

REPORT SUMMARY

Landscape Conservation in a Changing Climate

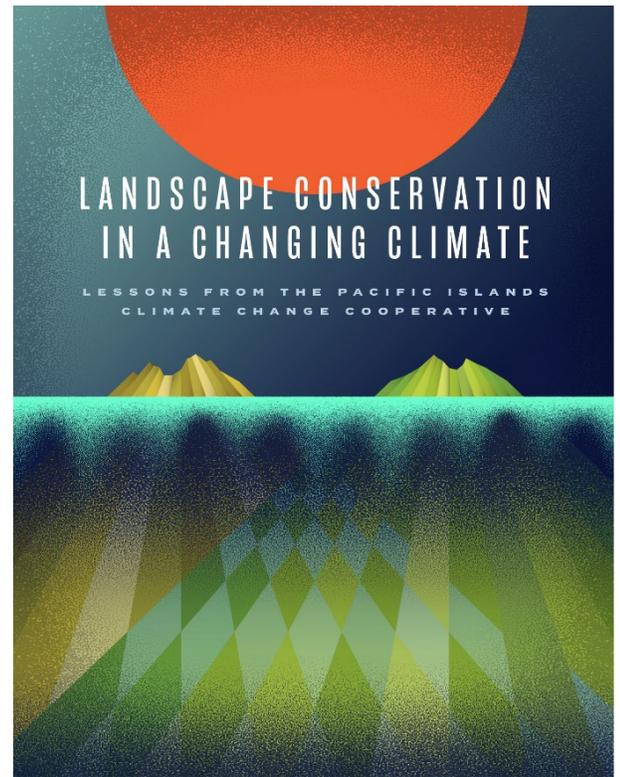
Lessons from the Pacific Islands Climate Change Cooperative

A new report investigating the Pacific Islands Climate Change Cooperative (PICCC)'s achievements in the Hawaiian Islands has been published by the East-West Center. Based on interviews and a survey, this analysis describes the foundational conditions from which the PICCC set out to establish a landscape conservation framework, the challenges it faced, its goals and achievements, and transferable lessons from the experience for any conservation community working with limited resources across large expanses of land and ocean. The research underlying this report serves as a record of the unique landscape conservation and climate adaptation approach developed by the PICCC's steering committee and partners over the course of their collaboration, and points to the benefits that have been and could be achieved in sustained landscape-scale conservation efforts.

Introduction

The Pacific Islands Climate Change Cooperative was one of 22 Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCCs) established during the Obama Administration as self-directed conservation alliances. This network of cooperatives extended across the continental US and into parts of Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean, and the Pacific Islands. The PICCC was made up of local, state, federal, indigenous, and NGO members with the charter purpose of "assisting those who manage native species, island ecosystems, and key cultural resources in adapting their management to climate change for the continuing benefit of the people of the Pacific Islands."

The National Academy of Sciences published an evaluation of the LCC Network in 2016, seven years after the first LCCs were established. They found that the LCCs were unique among federal programs and that the landscape approach to conservation was needed to address the far-reaching environmental challenges of the 21st Century.



Landscape Conservation in a Changing Climate: Lessons from the Pacific Islands Climate Change Cooperative by Wendy Miles and Susanne Moser (2021) can be downloaded at: <https://eastwestcenter.org/LandscapeConservation>

Formal evaluations of landscape conservation initiatives remain rare and this is one of these rare evaluations of an individual LCC made public. This retrospective analysis of the PICCC provides an opportunity to learn from the unique landscape conservation approach that was developed in Hawai'i and the US-Affiliated Pacific Islands, which emphasized climate adaptation. It points to the benefits that have been and could be achieved through sustained landscape-scale conservation efforts.

"You want to have some documentation left behind that persists, that captures the issues, captures the energy that went into it.... When the country and the Department of the Interior are receptive to talking about climate change and really investing in it again, you'll have these documents that are like the preserved memory of years of investment and thinking about climate adaptation... keeping the life alive."

—Former Steering Committee Member of the Pacific Islands Climate Change Cooperative, Hawai'i, August 2018

Research Highlights

During the decade in which the PICCC operated, Hawai'i's natural resource management community increasingly embraced the need for examples and knowledge of what it takes to successfully adapt (Fig. 1). The PICCC created an approach to facilitating adaptation and fostering partnerships that was largely viewed as effective by those surveyed and interviewed. However, PICCC's funding and staff capacity were too low to adequately serve the Cooperative's huge service area. In addition, uncertainty about the organization's long-term survival inhibited its ability to make long-term commitments and engage in forward thinking with its partners at a deeper level.

Despite PICCC's closure in 2018, some of its impacts persist. In particular, the increased communication on adaptation responses to climate change led to enhanced collaboration among former PICCC member organizations. However, whether such communication and collaboration can be sustained without a centralized forum for exchange over the longterm is uncertain. In PICCC's absence, natural resource managers are actively seeking where to go for climate information and adaptation support. As the number of organizations and agencies working to address climate change grows, increased coordination across the natural and biocultural resource management community is needed.

The PICCC's major contributions included **providing technical assistance** and **fostering partnerships** in support of climate

adaptation, activities that reinforced each other and helped propel the work of the Cooperative forward. The PICCC model was widely viewed as effective and is believed to have helped accelerate the natural resource management community's collective understanding of climate change.

However, the authors found that current pressing issues feel all-consuming for many of the islands' natural resource managers (Fig. 2). This pressure is compounded by the overwhelming challenge of climate change and insufficient funds to implement adaptation plans. Additional critical gaps include lack of funding sources to implement grassroots and community-based resilience initiatives, and the need for continued work to incorporate climate science into natural resource management actions.

Extent to which Hawai'i's natural resource management organizations and agencies were incorporating climate change science into their work in 2009 versus 2018

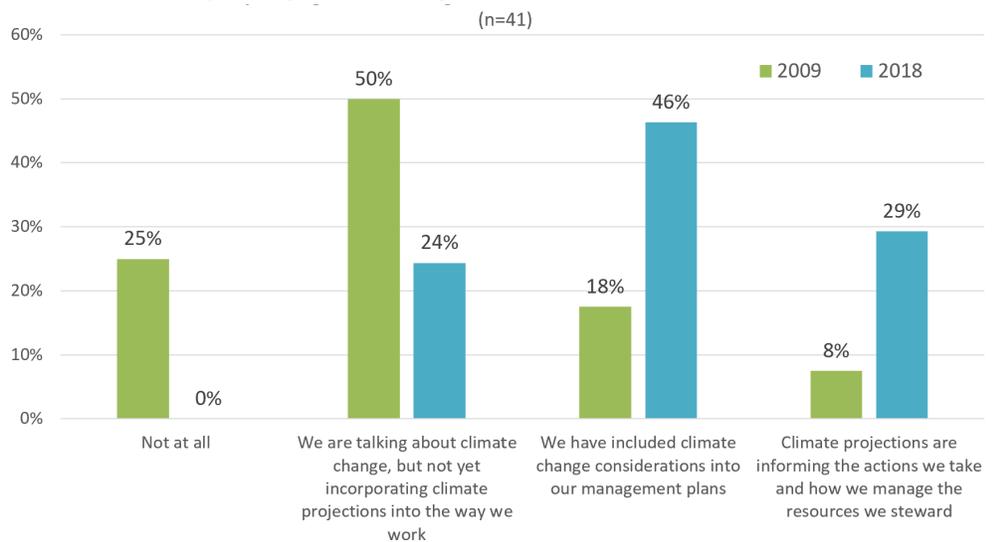


Figure 1: Changes in the integration of climate science into natural resource management in Hawai'i

Perceived Severity of Adaptation Barriers for Hawai'i's Natural Resource Managers

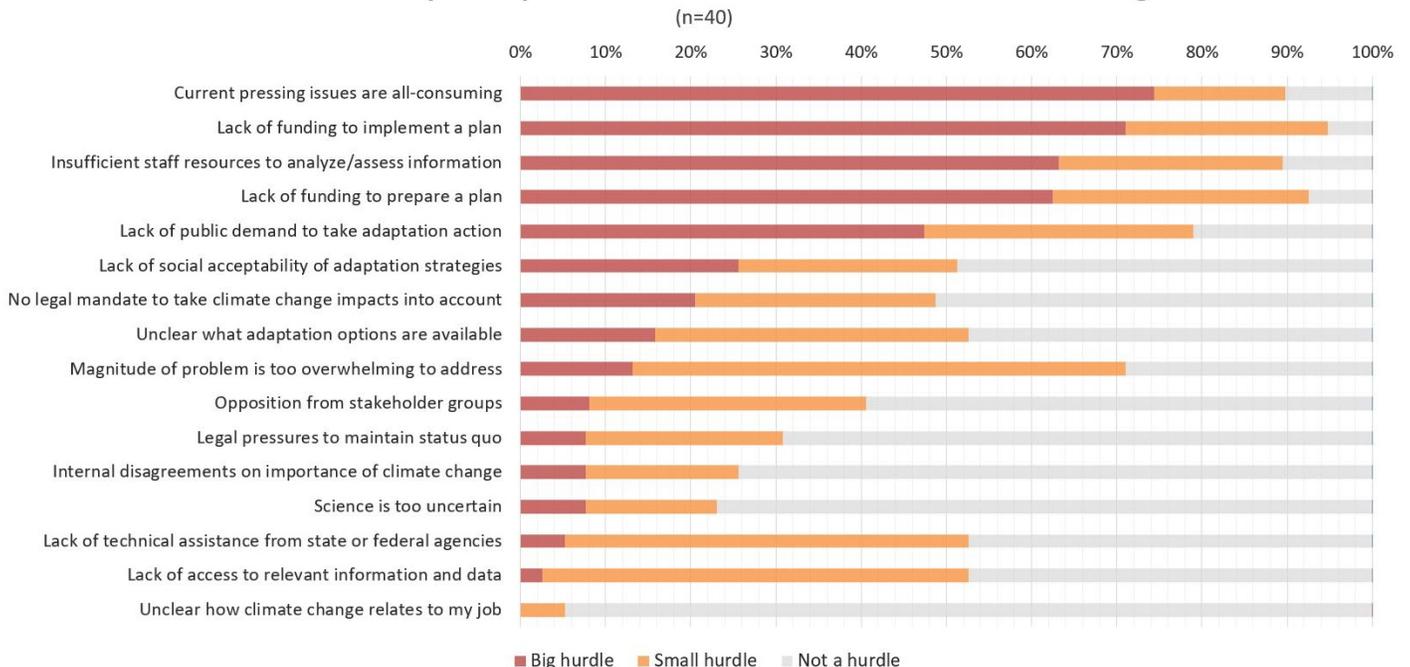


Figure 2: Perceived severity of adaptation barriers for Hawai'i's natural and biocultural resource managers.

In conclusion, while it took time for PICCC to build a functional coalition and self-organize around a mutually agreed, two-pronged strategy, that strategy proved remarkably empowering and successful. Time and diminishing resources were the key constraining factors. In other words, with sustained and increased support—to invest more evenly and substantially across the region and offer the personalized technical adaptation support that PICCC coalition members so appreciated—PICCC could have had a profound and lasting impact. Where that impact did not fully materialize or is waning now, it is not because of an inadequacy in its continually learning-oriented approach, but because PICCC did not have the capacity and, ultimately, because it was defunded.



A Kaua'i landscape abundant with ecological, cultural, and community resources, including the town of Līhu'e, the historic Alekoko Fishpond, and Hulē'ia National Wildlife Refuge. (Miles 2018)

“PICCC stands out as a place in which all the consequences of climate change came into sharp focus for us, but you also felt this amazing ability to deal with it. You felt like—it wasn’t just a matter of standing by and wringing your hands over what was coming down the pike—we were in the position to change our policies and activities to maximize our ability to deal with it.”

“I think that the climate change adaptation conversation is really just getting started, and with the engagement of multiple generations and communities, and the acknowledgement of science and culture, we’ve got a great future ahead of us, despite the politics. ...It is something that is not going to go away just because you take the name of it and its money away; you’ve still got people, and people’s commitment to place, and community—[regardless of] where we all end up in the future.”

Recommendations

Hawai‘i’s natural and biocultural resource management community offered a range of recommendations based on their experiences with the landscape-scale conservation approach, which provide some guiding stars to help us along on the next leg of the adaptation journey. These lessons in laulima (many hands, working together) should inform any future efforts in rebuilding a coordinating mechanism to support landscape conservation efforts.

Recommendations for Institution-Building and Organizational Management

- Establish and adequately support a stable institution that has staying power but design it such that it can accommodate an iterative, evolutionary adaptation process.
- Design the institution, initiatives, and projects with longevity in mind.
- Anticipate and invest in building a strong steering committee.
- Identify upfront the right representatives; this pays dividends many times over.
- Coalesce around a shared agenda to decrease competition and conflict, and support collaborations and the optimization of individual and collective talents and resources. Trusted leadership that helps identify shared goals and values is essential.
- Consider carefully geographic representation and increase inclusivity.

Recommendations for Science and Technical Support

- Co-design projects—and requisite science—involving technical experts, practitioners, and decision-makers to ensure results meet decision needs at influential decision points.
- Consider more personalized support for mainstreaming adaptation, such as designing an “adaptation support” mechanism for critical periods in a partner organization’s management planning process.
- Develop tools and strategies that support people in the transitions to thinking about managing natural resources in the context of climate change.
- Make deliberate efforts to transition former PICCC partners and stakeholders to the new repository of PICCC outputs and tools.



An aerial view of Molokai. Local neighborhoods, coral reefs, and loko i'a (ancient fishponds) can be seen on the south shore, while Kalaupapa National Historical Park is visible on the north coast. (Photo: Harrington 2020)

Recommendations for Building a Community of Practice

- › Invest in effective communications. For initiatives aiming to influence behavior, consider focusing more resources on community-based social marketing.
- › Engage messengers who are trusted by the audience you aim to address and have the ability to effectively translate the climate science, and how it is applicable in people's work.
- › Train climate scientists, communicators, and practitioners in "bedside manners" needed for sharing the gravity of the information they are conveying to the public.
- › Support the personal resilience of those working at the front lines of climate change, which includes the natural and biocultural resource management community.
- › Foster peer-to-peer exchanges and "learning trees" so that one set of partners can be a resource for another set of partners that are earlier in the process of taking an adaptation action.

Recommendations for Fostering Adaptation Action

- › Think globally and systemically, act locally. Developing shared strategies that link global (climate) challenges to local ones, and carefully assess the impacts of adaptation actions on others, is a critical iterative task.
- › Look towards the future in management decisions, because environmental baselines will continue to shift. In a continually changing climate and environment, adaptation is a continual task. This is counter to traditional management approaches and means projects need to be designed with an evolving future in mind; monitoring, evaluation, and learning must be built into projects, and resource commitments should be made wisely to minimize future needs when adjustments are necessary.
- › Strive towards climate change resiliency in ways that are pono (righteous) and rooted in culture, community, and place.
- › Build on the strong interest in and enthusiasm for grassroots and community-based initiatives. To date, there are limited opportunities to fund or support community-based work in Hawai'i; however, this is the level to which adaptation efforts must be attuned.

This is a summary of the report:

Miles, Wendy B., and Susanne C. Moser. 2021. *Landscape Conservation in a Changing Climate: Lessons from the Pacific Islands Climate Change Cooperative*. Honolulu, HI: East-West Center.

For the full report, please visit: <https://www.eastwestcenter.org/LandscapeConservation>



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