



Pa'auilo Mauka Kalopa Community Association

Photo courtesy of Karl Backus

## Monthly News & Updates

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### January 2023 Newsletter

# *December's Strong "Kona" Storm*

## *Facing extreme weather in mauka Pa'auilo and Kalōpā*

Ruth Bennett  
PMKCA Vice Prez



*Joe Clarkson helping to clear Waika'alulu Rd.*

I'm not a meteorologist, but, like most folks who appreciate nature, I've been looking out at "the weather" all my life. The ancients, indigenous people everywhere (native Hawaiians and my Celtic ancestors of northern Britain), looked at and felt and breathed and sensed and UNDERSTOOD the weather. We're all just following in the footsteps of the ancients when we really pay attention to the weather around us.

We on the Hāmākua coast were probably paying attention when the advisories of a "Strong Storm Front", or a "Kona Storm" were first being received. Somewhat ashamedly, I was looking forward to it! It had been nearly four years since any major weather event had affected my home in mauka Pa'auilo. My gulch and tributary water channels that had once

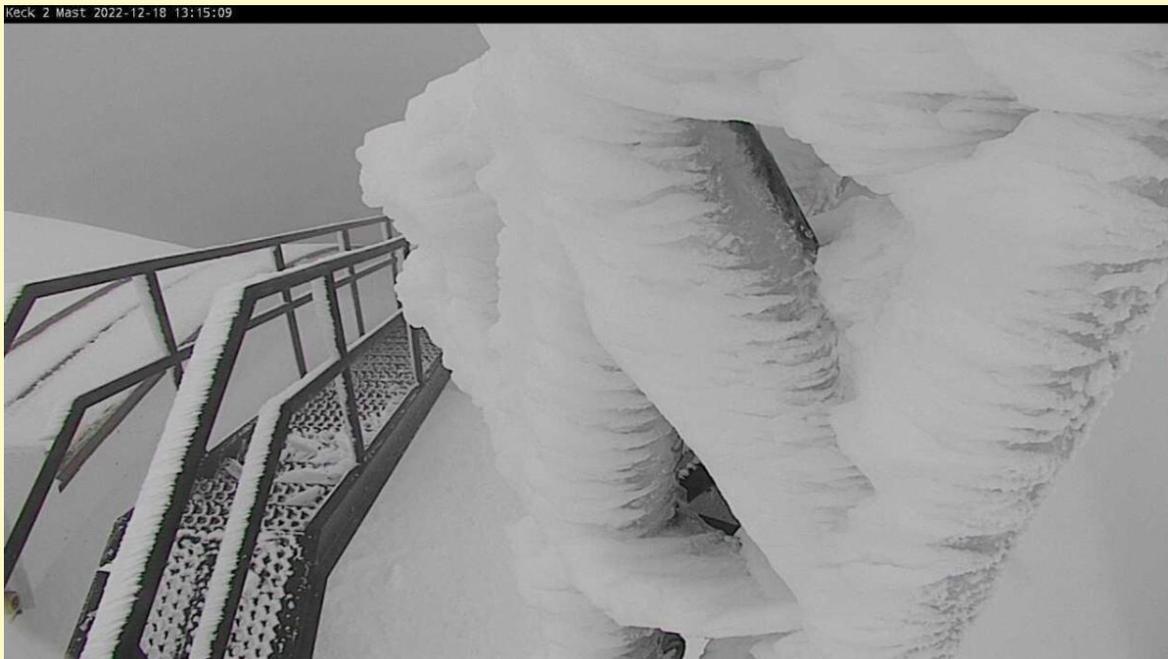
been stripped bare in floods, were choked with brush, tangled weeds, and broken tree limbs. I was expecting, looking forward, almost, to a good landscape scrubbing. My neighbors reported the same.

Predicting the path and intensity of a major storm approaching the island of Hawai'i is a meteorologist's nightmare, especially when the forecaster is in an office on O'ahu. It's like playing a game of billiards when the table isn't flat, the balls are of different sizes, and you're not even in the room!

When the first reports warned of an approaching strong cold front from the northwest, we (PMKCA) put out a bulletin to our email list with a bit more local detail and some recommendations for preparation for the storm. We know from past events that strong winds in our mauka areas bring down trees, break power lines and block roads, and that heavy rains from stalled thunderstorms can flood low areas and damage bridges. Preparedness might be critical to some in our community.

The arc of the storm and its effects on our coast started slowly on Sunday, December 19 and steadily grew through its peak on Monday night. Several residents of the Pa'auilo Mauka and Kalōpā areas kept notes on the storm and its effects. The local chapter of CERT put its members on standby should they be needed in an emergency.

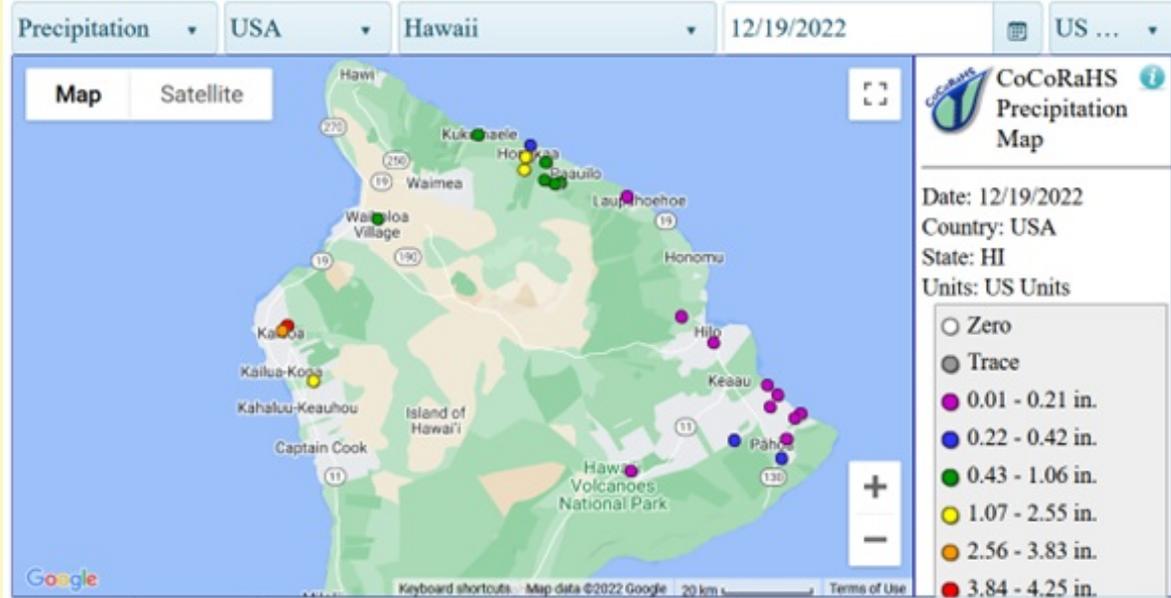
Sunday began with lots of sunshine, but clouds moved in from the northwest, and rain developed in the late afternoon. The air was relatively still, but cold. The webcam views on top of Maunakea (<http://mkwc.ifa.hawaii.edu/current/cams/>) were obscured by fog and temperatures at the summit were below freezing.



*Ice forming on Maunakea equipment, Sunday Dec. 18.*

Overnight Sunday into Monday, lightning was frequent over the sea but so distant that the thunder couldn't be heard in our neighborhood.

On Monday morning, at 7 AM, I poured 0.53" of overnight rain from my NOAA-standardized rain gauge. I participate with others on the Hāmākua Coast in a nationwide "volunteer network of backyard weather observers" called CoCoRaHs ([www.cocorahs.org](http://www.cocorahs.org)) and I report my rain figures daily to the website. Within seconds after adding my measurement via their website, I could compare my 24-hour rain total to those of all the other volunteers via a color-coded map of Hawai'i Island. (By the way, the map is available to be viewed by anyone for any day.)



*CoCoRaHs map of rain totals for 24 hours ending 7am 19 Dec 2022.*

I could see that rain reporters in Ahualoa and Honoka'a showed twice as much rain as I and my neighbors in Pa'auilo and Kalōpā were getting, and the Puna and Hilo districts were practically dry. However, rain gauges on the Kona side in Hōlualoa and Kaloko had been clobbered by over 4 inches! The storm was on its way, and it was proving itself to be a Kona storm – bringing the brunt of the storm to the Kona and Kohala districts, then to Waimea and down to the Hāmākua Coast.

While the actual storm front was still more than a hundred miles away, the advance "legions" of the storm were arriving in waves. Satellite maps showed curving bands of deep, cold clouds, and radar images showed those same bands full of moderate to heavy rain.

On Monday afternoon, the winds picked up dramatically and clouds began to move in again from the northwest – another band was arriving, and thunder could be heard from Upolu Point and Hawī.

A resident of Pa'auilo was making a trip to Kona that Monday afternoon to pick up a friend arriving on a flight. Here's what he said of his trip there and back: "...rain showery Waimea to Kona on Hwy 190, then a deluge in Kona down to Hwy 19 and the airport -- wipers on high with 20 mph max safe speed. Flight landed on time, a bit bumpy, but the airport wouldn't put the jetway out to the plane because of lightning in the area, so I had to wait a while. Better coming back... but two floods across 19 north of Waikoloa about 6-inches deep, running fast across a 50-ft span. Watched a few cars, then crossed okay. Bounced over some debris or rocks and saw some patches of pavement washed out." Definitely, not a day to be driving – or flying! – to KOA!

The storm really took off on Monday afternoon and evening. Wind gusts of over 62 mph were reported in the mid-afternoon in Pa'auilo. The winds in our area were blowing downslope, a direction that is unusual for trees in our tradewind-constrained area. I watched one precariously angled 'ohi'a sway as it fought to stay upright. It maintained its grip somehow! Rain pelted the roof and spilled in sheets over the edges of overflowing gutters. Lightning lit the late afternoon clouds and thunder rumbled soon after. In my location, this was the worst that I saw of the storm.

Elsewhere, I learned later, it was much worse. Stories from folks in Ahualoa, Honoka'a and Kukuihaele were distressing.

Tuesday dawned meekly. I poured 1.44" from my rain gauge and reported it to CoCoRaHs. Again, the map showed the storm had pummeled our island from west to east. Waikoloa, nearly 4", Puna hardly any. As the day advanced, the weather stayed mild, but the reports of damage came in from Pa'auilo north to Waipi'o and west through Waimea.

HWY 19 between Honoka'a and Waimea was blocked by fallen trees and downed power lines from Monday night through Tuesday afternoon. Power was out from Pa'auhau through Honoka'a for much of this time, possibly due to a tree falling on the power station at Plumeria St and the highway. Ahualoa and Old Mamalahoa Highway were also closed due to many fallen trees and downed power lines.

In our mauka communities, residents reported blocked roads and downed power lines. Trees fell on Pohakea Rd, Pohakealani Rd, Waika'alulu Rd, within Kalopa Park, and no doubt in other areas.

Since our communities are familiar with the risk of isolation in storm situations, we again found that neighbors with chain saws were clearing the blocked roads long before the county could spare a crew to send to our area. Damaged power lines were carefully avoided. Still, it took a great effort on the part of a number of people to restore a semblance of normalcy to our mauka communities.



*A tree blocking Pohakealani Rd.*

Like the Pa'auilo fire of June 2021, this storm was another reminder of two important facts: The first is that preparedness is everything in being able to withstand and recover from a disaster. The second is that we, in our own homes and local neighborhoods, are all "first responders" in a crisis - but only if we are willing to help, and if we have the appropriate skills and tools to be helpful.

If you would like to be more prepared and to be more helpful, consider joining CERT, a Community Emergency Response Team, in your area.

And if you would like to add to our common understanding of rain on our island, consider joining CoCoRaHS and reporting rain from your own NOAA-standardized rain gauge.

**UPDATE:** This article was submitted for publishing in the Hamakua Times before the full extent of the damage and disruption from the storm was known. More reports have come in from our community and others, since the days of the storm. Roads were blocked for days and large areas were without power. There were many more stories of residents extending help to others. County agencies and HELCO worked long hours and brought in crews from other islands in order to bring some semblance of normalcy to our homes and businesses before Christmas.

*Mahalo to everyone who restored the Holidays to us!!*

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***Hau'oli Makahiki Hou!!***  
*Wishing you the best in 2023!*

***Coming PMKCA Meetings & Events***

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**Board of Directors Meeting**  
**Thursday, January 12, 2023 - 6 PM**  
*Location: TBD (Call a Board Member for directions.)*  
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**GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING**  
**Tuesday, January 31, 2023 - 7 PM**  
*Location: [Returning to the Pa'auilo School Cafeteria!!](#)*  
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Oh, and by the way,  
**Join PMKCA or Renew Your Membership  
for 2023!!**

**PMKCA dues are only \$20 per calendar year and help support so many great community activities. Click the "Visit our website" link below and choose Membership/Dues.**

**We offer a PayPal option, or mail a check made out to PMKCA, PO Box 408, Pa'auilo, HI 96776.**

**Easy-peasy - and important!**

[Visit our website](#)



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Photo courtesy of Karl Backus