

Outstanding Leadership Award: Art Medeiros

This nominates Art Medeiros for the HCA Outstanding Leadership Award due to the large number of people he has inspired to care about conservation biology and protecting natural resources in Hawaii.

Art was born on Oahu, and moved to Maui early in his career to work as a biologist for the National Park Service. In 1994, he became part of the USGS when the Pacific Islands Ecosystems Research Center was formed. Since then, he has devoted his life and career to ecologic research and conservation. In 2004, Art earned his PhD in botany from the University of Hawaii.

Working at Auwahi for the last 15 years, Art developed novel methods to implement dryland forest restoration. The forest is a showcase for restoration in Hawaii. But this award is about leadership, not success, so it's important to describe the ways in which his leadership has been so important and has great significance beyond Auwahi.

First, getting permission to work at the site was not easy. The landowner was less than keen to have federal scientists doing "experiments" on valuable ranch land. However, Art's passion, vision, and diplomacy were compelling, and the owner allowed Art to attempt restoration on 10 acres of land. Based on that success, the landowner has since dedicated 184 acres for forest restoration. One mark of leadership is getting people to do something that they are not initially comfortable about, and then having them feel good about it afterwards. Such is the case here.

Secondly, Art's vision has inspired the masses. The restoration project took work – a lot of it. Because of Art's leadership, over 4,675 volunteers have dedicated over 34,000 hours of free labor and planted over 120,000 native scrubs and trees. Volunteer trips are always fully booked, so great is the desire to be part of a conservation success story. This is a case of leadership by allowing people to develop and nurture conservation values, thereby spreading the conservation ethic broadly through the local community.

Third, Art is a science leader. He started with an idea about how to restore a dryland forest. After years of hard work, he then wondered how does this restored forest affect the water cycle? Art connected with hydrologists to put together a team that measured how the restored forest compared with the adjacent grasslands. And the results indicate rain falling on the forest infiltrates deeper and faster compared to grass, suggesting that the forest may improve ground water recharge and thus fresh water resources. Next, Art wondered how the new forest functioned as an ecosystem, and is currently working with colleagues to measure predation on seeds within the forest. His curious mind and science leadership continue to discover new things about our Hawaiian ecosystems.

Finally, Art's humility is the hallmark of transformative leadership. Art's dedication, knowledge, and enthusiasm often mask a deeply humble man who simply wants to learn about Hawaiian ecosystems and see to their protection. At the end of the day, Art always comes back to the work being motivated by a desire to learn, inspire the current generation, and improve the environment for future generations.

Art has been my friend and colleague for about 15 years. I have been his boss for the last 4 of those years. Throughout that time, we shared ideas and sometimes disagreed. But one constant has been Art's passion and leadership for conservation Biology in Hawaii.

Respectfully submitted by Gordon Tribble, USGS