



September 2023

# THE BIG ISLAND HAMGRAM

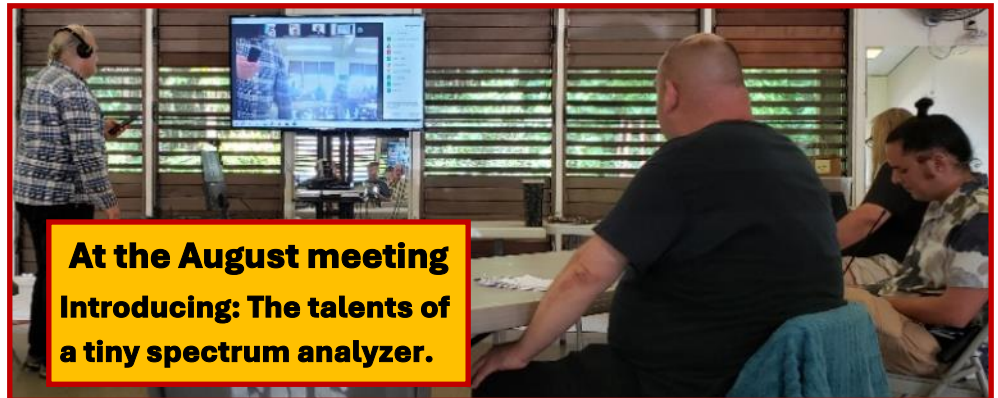
The newsletter of the Big Island Amateur Radio Club

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course nets 11 new hams  
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**At the August meeting  
Introducing: The talents of  
a tiny spectrum analyzer.**

Photo by Linda Quarberg, WH6LQ

Club met Aug.13 on Zoom and at the Kamana Senior Center in Hilo. The main topic was a presentation by Jim Huntley, WH6FQI, on the many benefits of using a tinySA.

## THE PRESIDENT'S CORNER



Alan Okinaka,  
KH6ATU

Morning nets offer fun, fellowship, info and a good way to start the day with a big smile

Participating in the morning net is always a good way to start your day. On Monday, Wednesday, and Friday mornings, at 8 a.m., Paul Ducasse WH7BR, Del Winn WH6DEL, and Chris Allen WH6DCC, respectively, serve as net control, or facilitators, for an enjoyable morning chat about anything and everything under the sun or rain.

Continued on next page



### Stub tuning with NanoVNA



### Tuned stub



### What can we do with the TinySA

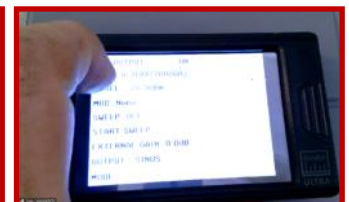
- Transceiver repair.
- Transceiver alignment.
- Spurious signal identification and location.
- Radio direction finding.
- View and measure effectiveness of filtering.
- Test receiver sensitivity using built in Signal generator.
- Verify and/or calibrate S-meter on transceivers.

### Big Island Amateur Radio Club

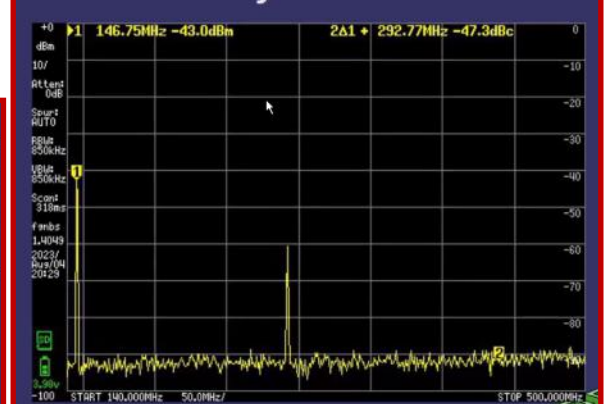
TinySA Ultra

August 13, 2023

By  
WH6FQI



### Field Day Fox with Stub



# THE PRESIDENT'S CORNER

*From previous page*

The BIARC VHF repeater on Kulanani Cone on frequency 146.760 is used for this net, so if you can hit this repeater, you can participate in the net conversation.

For the world of amateur radio, participating in these nets is very important. First, it gives you the opportunity to make sure your radio equipment is working. Participants have helped each other by noting problems with the quality of transmissions and offer a solution to resolve the problem. Poor audio levels due to defective microphone or microphone connection, antenna problems due to high resistance shorts (moisture) in connectors and cable, location-location-location for portable and handheld radio operators, and of course sometimes our repeater is not working properly.

Second, the call signs of ham operators checking in are recorded and submitted to the Federal Communications Commission to show active usage of radio frequencies assigned for amateur radio operators. So, even if you just check in and check out, you are counted and this helps to keep these frequencies available for amateur radio usage.

Third, you get a chance to know what's going on with other ham operators. Topics range from the weather to recent activities on the high frequency bands. You want to know about sunspot activities? There is always someone who will provide this information.

Del Winn WH6DEL gives us a chance to see how well our brains are working by asking us to solve a riddle. Getting a rich list of possible answers is always fun, and the winning answer receives two gold stars (virtual) from Del. The rule here is that the obvious is often not the right answer.

So, join the net and brighten the start of your day with a radio smile, which will last the whole day.

## BIARC meeting info

*The club now gets together on the second Sunday of the month at Kamana Senior Center at 127 Kamana St. in Hilo.*

*The Executive Board meets at noon, with the membership gathering following at 2 p.m. Zoom access is provided. The link will be shared on the BIARC Listserve forum prior to the meeting.*

## Grid Madness is back! Gear up for popular event Sept. 17

Great News!

Grid Madness has been resurrected for 2023 and will take place Sunday, Sept. 17, from 1300 to 1700 HST, reports Mel Uchida, KH6EKD.

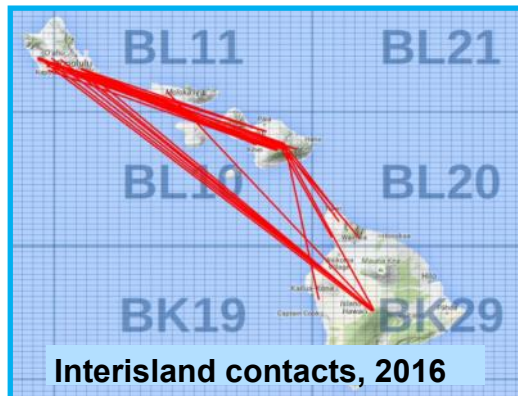
"We're grateful for volunteers who have stepped forward to help with log verification and compilation (a huge task), awards and recognition, and web assistance," said Mel. "Without their help this event would not take place

"Keep this date open for radio fun. About a week before the actual event I will be sending out another reminder along with final rules of this year's contest."

(<https://gridmadness.blogspot.com/p/home.html>)

We've been fortunate to pull this together for this year. Going forward, however, we will need help in order to have a contest next year. We are specifically looking for individuals or groups who can assist with mailing list maintenance, web design, and rules updates. If you have any interest in helping out, please contact me: [glenmio@aol.com](mailto:glenmio@aol.com)

Grid Madness was created



**Interisland contacts, 2016**

and sponsored by the Aulani Hui Amateur Radio Repeater Club and coordinated by Stan Froseth (AH6KO) from 2014-2021.

**Grid Squares:** Find your 6-character Maidenhead Grid Square on the map at [www.qrz.com/gridmapper](http://www.qrz.com/gridmapper). The "squares" are actually more like rectangles, roughly 2 miles by 4 miles.

Go to the Hawaii grid Madness website to download the excel spreadsheet & printable forms.

Send all your logs (spreadsheet and forms) to [glenmio@aol.com](mailto:glenmio@aol.com).

From this year, we need your email address to email your certificate. We will no longer print & mail certificates.

*Continued on next page*





## Hawaiian Islands

**What:** Contact as many stations as you can in as many grid squares as you can, using **SIMPLEX ONLY**.

**When:** Sunday, September 17th from 1300 to 1700W

**Where:** Get information at <https://gridmadness.blogspot.com/>

**Why:** You know who you can contact when repeaters are offline, you know your station's area of coverage, and you learn how to log contacts.

**How:** Use your vhf/uhf radio and call out. You will need to know your grid square location for message exchange. Ask Mel Uchida ([glenmio@aol.com](mailto:glenmio@aol.com)) or Darrell Asuka ([dasuka001@gmail.com](mailto:dasuka001@gmail.com)) for details.

## Grid Madness is back for 2023

Date: Sunday September 17 between 1pm & 5pm.

Go to the [Hawaii Grid Madness Website](https://gridmadness.blogspot.com/) to download the excel spreadsheet & printable forms.

Send all your logs (spreadsheet and forms) to [glenmio@aol.com](mailto:glenmio@aol.com).

From this year, we need your email address to email your certificate. We will no longer print & mail certificates.

Questions? Contact KH6EKD ([glenmio@aol.com](mailto:glenmio@aol.com)) or KH6RDO ([dasuka001@gmail.com](mailto:dasuka001@gmail.com)). Hope to hear you on.

Get the scoops at: <http://www.gridmadness.blogspot.com/>

The peacock mantis shrimp, also known as the harlequin mantis shrimp (*Odontodactylus scyllarus*), is a particularly colorful and intriguing species within the mantis shrimp family. Here are some specific facts about the peacock mantis shrimp:

**Vibrant Coloration:** As the name suggests, the peacock mantis shrimp is known for its stunning and vibrant colors. Its exoskeleton exhibits a dazzling array of shades, including bright blues, greens, oranges, and reds. These colors are not just for show; they are used in communication and signaling to other mantis shrimp.

**Size:** Peacock mantis shrimp are relatively large among mantis shrimp species, with adults typically reaching lengths of 3 to 7 inches (7.5 to 18 centimeters), depending on their age and sex.

**Complex Vision:** Like other mantis shrimp, peacock mantis shrimp have complex and highly developed eyes. They possess up to 12 to 16 types of color receptors and can detect a broad spectrum of colors and polarized light. This advanced vision helps them identify prey, predators, and potential mates.

**Smashers:** Peacock mantis shrimp are "smashers," meaning they have club-like appendages that they use to deliver incredibly powerful strikes. They use these appendages to break open the shells of hard-shelled prey, such as crabs and snails.

**Predatory Behavior:** These mantis shrimp are carnivorous predators that actively hunt for their prey. They use their strong front appendages to strike with lightning speed and accuracy, immobilizing or killing their prey.

**Burrow Dwellers:** Peacock mantis shrimp are typically found in burrows that they excavate in the sand or coral rubble. They are solitary creatures and can be quite territorial, defending their burrows from intruders.

**Mantis Boxing:** When peacock mantis shrimp encounter each other, they may engage in a form of ritualized combat, known as "mantis boxing," to establish dominance or resolve territorial disputes. This behavior involves displaying their striking appendages and attempting to intimidate each other without causing serious harm.

**Unique Reproduction:** Peacock mantis shrimp reproduce by laying eggs in a specialized cavity. The male is responsible for guarding the eggs and ensuring they receive sufficient oxygen until they hatch. This parental care is unusual in the world of crustaceans.

**Popular in Aquaria:** Due to their striking appearance and intriguing behavior, peacock mantis shrimp are sometimes kept in marine aquariums. However, they can be challenging to care for because of their aggressive nature and specific habitat requirements.

The peacock mantis shrimp's remarkable appearance and behavior make it a popular subject of study for marine biologists and a captivating species for marine enthusiasts to observe in both the wild and captivity.



## State cancels September siren test due to remembrance ceremonies planned for Maui wildfire victims

The monthly test of the all-hazard Statewide Outdoor Warning Siren System was canceled on Friday, Sept. 1, out of respect for a planned moment of statewide prayer and remembrance for those killed or missing in the Maui wildfires.

"Out of concern and recognition that sounding the sirens could disrupt the observance and cause distress, the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency (HI-EMA) will not conduct the September siren test," said a government spokesman.

Maintenance and repair work on the siren system will continue as usual, and the next siren test will be conducted on the regularly scheduled date, Monday, Oct. 2.

"Aloha everyone. We offer our thoughts and prayers to all those profoundly affected by the tragic Maui wildfires," said Bev Gable, KH7LM, a volunteer helping to coordinate the Big Island Monthly Siren Net for the Hawaii County Civil Defense Agency (HCCDA).

The [Big Island Monthly Siren Net](https://www.hawaiisoul.org/maui/) serves as a vital practice drill to ensure the island's readiness for emergencies, including natural disasters such as hurricanes, tsunamis, and volcanic eruptions.

Siren status reports are turned in by amateur radio operators stationed at various locations across the island using the [Hawaii AllStar Network](https://www.hawaiisoul.org/maui/), or via email, text, relay and Winlink.

On Sept. 1, the worldwide remembrance for Lahaina included Native Hawaiian sunrise and sunset ceremonies and a midday (HST) observance.



For more about this special event, visit: <https://www.hawaiisoul.org/maui/>

KH7LM also shares a link to an uplifting update on the iconic [Lahaina Banyan Tree](https://www.hawaiisoul.org/maui/), "symbolizing hope for a fresh beginning for our people and our land."

**(For details about the Siren Net, go to [nh6tu.org](https://www.hawaiisoul.org/maui/) › forms › BigIslandMonthlySirenNet)**  
Mahalo for supporting HCCDA efforts.

### ~ 2023 BIARC Roster ~

#### Executive Board officers and committee chairs

##### President

Alan Okinaka, KH6ATU

##### Vice President

James Huntley, WH6FQI

##### Secretary

Joseph Rosenbaum,  
WH6JOE

##### Treasurer

Tony Kitchen, WH6DVI

##### At-Large directors

Roy Kunishige, KH6KU, and  
David Miller, KH6CZ

##### KH6EJ station custodian

William Polhemus, NH6ET

##### Public Service/ Communications Committee

Chair David Miller, KH6CZ

##### Operating Activities Committee

Chair John Bush, KH6DLK

##### Education and

##### Outreach Committee

Chair Leslie Hittner, K0BAD

##### Programs Committee

Chair James Huntley, WH6FQI

##### Digital Systems Committee

Chair James Huntley, WH6FQI

##### Voice Repeaters Committee

Chair William Polhemus, NH6ET

##### Meeting Refreshments

##### Committee

Chair Robert Schneider, AH6J

##### BIARC Hamgram

Editor Leigh Critchlow, WH6LC

**Club website:** <https://biarc.net>

### [HawaiiARES] Winlink practice

A new Winlink practice started May 29. Please check your Winlink account for instructions.

If you are not a member of this net and are interested in joining the Winlink practice, please send me a Winlink message (NH7IT).

To learn more about Winlink, check out <https://wavetalkers.com/resources/digital/winlink.php>

-- Van NH7IT ASEC-Pac



BIARC volunteers conducted an experimental accelerated Technician License Preparation Class on August 26-27 in Hawi. Instructors Doug Wilson, KH7DQ, and Jim Tatar, WH6EMN, report the effort was a big success, as 11 out of the 14 students passed their exams and earned their Technician Licenses.

*Photo by Kathy Matsuda  
Kohala Resilience Hub Coordinator  
North Kohala Community Resource Center*

## Hawi accelerated Tech License prep class a big success

BIARC volunteers conducted an experimental accelerated Technician License Preparation Class on August 26 and 27 in Hawi.

The 2-day course included an exam session that was proctored by Doug Wilson (KH7DQ), Jim Tatar (WH6EMN), Linda Quarberg (WH6LQ) Ceri Sanders (AH6CS) and Rick Bowen (AH6RK).

Instructors Doug Wilson and Jim Tatar had given the students some preparation work online and study materials that were sent to them prior

to the 2-day classroom sessions on that Saturday and Sunday.

Both Doug and Jim felt that the course was successful, as 11 out of the 14 students passed their exam and earned their Technician License.

As a result of this successful experiment, Doug says that this 2-day course will be offered again in the future along with the regular 6-week version.

Rick and Ceri also were pleased with the success of the ham crash

course program arranged by Kathy Matsuda, Kohala Resilience Hub coordinator for the North Kohala Community Resource Center. Kathy will coordinate communications between the new hams and the Kohala Hamakua Radio Club community.

The group of students consisted of residents and business owners who are “acutely aware of the need for non-cell communication within their area,” said Rick and Ceri.

## NH7RY, NH7UA to promote amateur radio at Sept. 9 Waimea prep fair

Michelle Taira Medeiros NH7RY and Norm Cohler NH7UA will be sharing the “what, why, and how of amateur radio” at the ‘Are You Ready?’ Waimea Fire Prevention & Resilience Fair from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Saturday, Sept. 9.

With help from fellow hams, the

duo will include demonstrations of 2-meter transmissions.

The Waimea Resilience Hub has been planning this event for nearly a year, in collaboration with nonprofit and community organizations; and

federal, state and county agencies

The event will be at Mana Christian ‘Ohana Kahilu Town Hall (Across from Kahilu Theatre) at 67-1182 Lindsey Road in Waimea.



## Tune in to BIARC repeater Wednesday, Sept. 6, for special net featuring keiki of E.B. deSilva School

President Alan Okinaka, KH6ATU, encourages operators to listen in for a special net on the BIARC repeater, 146.760, in the late afternoon/early evening on Wednesday, Sept. 6, as BIARC volunteers introduce the wonders of ham radio to youngsters at the E.B. deSilva Elementary School Science Night.

It will be the second such outreach event for BIARC this year at the invitation of The Hawaii Science and Technology Museum is an educational non-profit, federally recognized 501(c)(3) public charity dedicated to Science, Technology, Engineering and Math education on the Island of Hawaii.

The BIARC Public Service Communication Committee (PSCC) Chair David Miller, KH6CZ, organized our club's participation at the Hilo Union School event earlier in the year.

"Three members attended (Joe, James Tatar, WH6EMN, and David Miller, KH6CZ), set up various radios, and conducted a net under our call signs that allowed the students to participate in radio interaction over the BIARC Kulani repeater.

"Several of our BIARC members stood by on the repeater to chat with the students," said David. "Additionally, we had handheld radios on hand for local use. We also had tables set up with various radio gear. It was deemed a successful event, and most enjoyed it.

"BIARC and the PSCC have been invited back to participate in the E.B. deSilva Elementary School Science Night event," he explained. "There will be a larger and younger group of students to interact with at the night event.

"This time, we plan to have four BIARC members in attendance on site (the trio from the first event, plus Mark Watanabe, WH6F-



**KH6CZ photo**

**James Tatar, WH6EMN, in background, and Joe Rosenbaum, WH6JOE, help introduce students to ham radio at a school outreach event earlier this year.**

SA). A number of our members will be standing by on the 146.76 repeater, and we hope that the younger students will have a positive introduction to using the airwaves.

"Notably, our new BIARC Club radio will be set up for its inauguration. Kudos to Roy Kunishige, KH6KU, and Jim Huntley, WH6FQI, for getting it programmed and set up," said David.

"We will have BIARC Outreach Committee trifold flyers and other materials on hand for handouts. Thanks to Les Hittner, K0BAD.

"Setup will begin at 4 p.m., when we arrive with our flyers, gear, coax, cables, tables, chairs, etc.," said David. And event radio traffic on 146.760 will be finished long before the BIARC Tech Net commences at 8 p.m. We are looking forward to an educational and enjoyable event." Official fair hours are 5:30-7 p.m. DeSilva School is located at 278 Ainako Ave. in Hilo.

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## Seeking radios for students

Dr. Bill Wiecking, KH6BI, director of the HPA Energy Lab, says several of the boarding students at Hawaii Preparatory Academy in Waimea are interested in getting their amateur radio licenses.

"To engage them further, I'm seeking older radios from

local hams that may be in receive-only mode or better that could serve as an entry point for these students to listen to DX and our nets," said Bill, .....

"If you know of anyone with a radio to donate, HPA can give donation credit if the value is known. Let me know how I can help."

Contact Bill at [bill=hpa.edu@groups.io](mailto:bill=hpa.edu@groups.io).

# BIARC EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING

## BEGIN MEETING:

The meeting was called to order at 12:05 pm on Sunday, August 13<sup>th</sup> by Board President Alan Okinaka. Venue was the Kamana Senior Center in Hilo.

## Quorum:

Board members: Alan Okinaka, James Huntley, Tony Kitchen, Roy Kunishige, David Miller and Joseph Rosenbaum.

## Secretary's Report and Minutes:

David moved and Roy seconded to approve the July 9<sup>th</sup> executive board minutes. Motion passed.

## Treasurer's Report:

No written report. We had two new members join and there was a reimbursement to William of approximately \$503 for the custom mountain bracket for the Kulani Cone linking project.

## Committee Reports:

**Public Service Communications Report:** See attached letter from Chair David Miller.

**Operating Activities:** Preparing for the CQWW SSB contest on Saturday, October 28<sup>th</sup> at Kuhio Kalaniana'ole Park in Hilo. Plans are still in the works for the quarterly workshops, just need a venue and date/time.

## Programs:

The August program was on the Tiny SA(Spectrum Analyzer) and next month's program will be a demonstration of the ATAS-120A (<https://www.dxengineering.com/parts/ysu-atas-120a#overview>) antenna that is designed to work with the new club Yaesu 991A radio.

**Digital Systems:** Plans are to install a digipeater at the Pepeekeo antenna tower site which would allow some operators on the Hamakua Coast to digipeat to Jim's or Gary's Winlink station.

**Voice Repeaters:** No written report. The Kulani Cone bracket has arrived.

**Education and Outreach:** No written report. Les will print out BIARC fliers for the EB de Silva elementary school science night.

## Old Business:

The swap table at the meetings has been going very well. A lot of good finds to be had.

Slate of nominations: In November's elections there will be 3 board positions to be filled and one to be ratified.

## New Business:

The CQWW SSB contest (see operating activities.)

The EB de Silva science night will be on September 6<sup>th</sup>, 2023. Several club members have volunteered to introduce amateur radio to the students. There will be radios on-site and the students will have a chance to get on the air.

## BIARC EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING

Tony moved and Roy seconded to assign the PSCC to create a standard operating procedures document for co-ordination between BIARC and other VOAD (Volunteer Organizations Active in Disasters) groups relating to requests for assistance. Motion passed.

Tony moved and Joe seconded to reimburse Bob Schneider \$37.96 for food and drinks at the meetings.

Tony moved and Joe seconded to purchase a professional Zoom account that all board members and committee chairs have access to and to create a gmail account for it that we can share.

David moved and Tony seconded to pay the remaining amount (approximately \$1333) after we received approximately \$1,050 from the auction to cover the purchase of a Yaesu 991A radio, 2-Pelican cases, antenna, radial system, etc. for the club radio system. Motion passed.

### Announcements:

Grid Madness has been revived, see website (<https://gridmadness.blogspot.com/p/home.html>)

## Public Service Communications Committee

For the Public Service Communications Committee, Chair David Miller, KH7CZ, has been BIARC's conduit for information pertaining to disasters.

As the BIARC representative to Hawaii Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD), David forwards updates from C. Pono Higa, the PIO for the Hawaii Wildfires Incident.

David attends the Maui Wildfire Coordination Zoom meetings that occur on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday of each week. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact him via the BIARC listserve email.

The *Maui County Wildfire Disaster Update*, a daily summary, can be viewed at <https://www.mauicounty.gov/CivicAlerts>.

There being no further business, Alan closed the meeting at 1:22pm. The next meeting will be on September 10<sup>th</sup> at the Kamana Senior Center in Hilo. The board meeting starts at noon and the club meeting starts at 2:00pm.

*Respectfully submitted,*  
**Joseph Rosenbaum**  
*Secretary*

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## CHurches and CHapels On The Air set for Saturday, Sept. 9

The [World Association of Christian Radio Amateurs and Listeners \(WACRAL\)](#) special event, **CHurches and CHapels On The Air (CHOTA)**, is on Saturday, Sept. 9.

The WACRAL organization was started in 1957 in England, by the Huddersfield South Methodist Radio Club. It's been ecumenical since 1978.

CHOTA is not a contest; it has been described as an institutional space for using amateur radio to reach the public, like Parks on the Air (POTA).

To date, there hasn't been any participation from amateur radio operators in the US.

However, ARRL Delta Division Assistant Director

Frank Howell, K4FMH, recently wrote to John Wresdell, G3XYF, manager of the CHOTA event, about getting the US involved by activating his church in Ridgeland, Mississippi.

To participate, send an email to Wresdell at [jhwresdell@gmail.com](mailto:jhwresdell@gmail.com) with the call sign you intend to use and the location of the church or chapel you plan to activate. Suggested frequencies for CHOTA 2023 are 20 meters on SSB, 40 meters on CW, and FT8. Operating times are 8:00 AM - 5:00 PM EDT.

Participants who make eight or more contacts will receive an award. More information can be found at [Awards - WACRAL.ORG](#).



## FCC dispatches help for Maui following disaster

The Federal Communications Commission pledged its support to Hawaii following the destructive and deadly Maui wildfires.

FCC Chairwoman Jessica listed all the ways the agency is working to support impacted communities — which include deploying FCC staff to Hawaii to determine the impact to public safety and emergency alerting capabilities, enabling wireless providers to deploy temporary microwave stations to the affected area to support wireless service, and monitoring the operational status of communications infrastructure on Maui and coordinating with government partners to support their restoration efforts.

The chairwoman said the FCC allowed the County of Maui to use additional frequencies to support public safety communications. And FCC staff performed remote High Frequency Direction Finding (HFDF) scans to determine and share the operational status of AM stations that support public safety communications.



**Saturday, September 2, marked the 85th anniversary of the Hiram Percy Maxim Memorial Station, W1AW, and the 154th anniversary of Maxim's birth. The station is located on the ARRL Headquarters campus in Newington, Connecticut.**

**Above:** The power switch and key to "Old Betsy", ARRL founder Maxim's spark gap transmitter that sits on his old executive desk, preserved in the entrance to W1AW. A framed photo of Maxim looks on.

**[Photo: Joe Buglewicz for ARRL]**



## Devastating Hawaii wildfires prompt response from Amateur Radio Emergency Service

ARRL-The National Association for Amateur Radio® has been closely following updates from the Hawaii Amateur Radio Emergency Service®, [Hawaii ARES®](#), as amateur radio operators have responded following deadly wildfires on Maui.

On Aug. 8, wildfires, fueled by the strong winds of Hurricane Dora, were burning in Maui and Hawai'i Counties. By the next day, much of Lāhainā on Maui had been destroyed.

ARRL Section Manager Joseph Speroni, AH0A, who serves the Pacific Section including Hawaii and US territories in the Pacific, sent a message to members across the section the next day: "The suddenness of the Maui disaster is shocking. It affects us all ... Sadly, there are now confirmed deaths and several of our ham friends have lost their homes."

Speroni reported that the ARRL Hawaii ARES website, <https://hawaii.ares.net>, was modified to provide the latest emergency communications news. The website includes updates on Maui's amateur radio and communication infrastructure, including affected and operational radio systems, repeaters, and other emergency communication details.

"Our thoughts and prayers go out to the people of Hawaii and especially the Island of Maui," said ARRL Director of Emergency Management Josh Johnston, KE5MHV. "[ARRL] was in initial contact with Section Manager Joe Speroni, AH0A, on Wednesday, August 9, and we have had daily briefs with him. This is an exceedingly challenging time for Hawaii, and we will be available as needed."

ARRL has offered equipment available through ARRL Ham Aid, a program established in 2005 and funded through donations that makes emergency communications equipment available on loan to amateur radio organizations during disaster response when communications equipment is unavailable.

Johnston emphasized that most of amateur radio communications, including any messages being relayed, are being handled on the existing repeater system in the state. On shortwave, HF stations across Hawaii are operating nets on 7.088 MHz. For more information about ARRL and Amateur Radio, visit [www.arrl.org](http://www.arrl.org).



# Big Isle farmers hold back fire that 'could have been another Lahaina'

By **Thomas Heaton**

***That same fateful day, a couple of farmers, a troop of cowboys and fire crews were all that stood between a Waimea wildfire and potential catastrophe.***

John Hall caught a faint whiff of smoke at his family's off-the-grid farmhouse before the sun rose over the Big Island, as he was logging into work remotely with his Colorado colleagues.

The windows were closed to keep out the hurricane-force winds rushing across the island. It was just after 4 a.m. on Aug. 8, two hours before sun would shine over Lalamilo Farm Lots.

"Where the sunrise would have been, I saw these huge flames coming up over the driveway," Hall said. Hall and his wife promptly headed out, calling his father in the process. Howard Hall runs the family farm but lives offsite.

The farm was on fire, Hall told his father. The house might soon be too.

Howard Hall met them at the farm gate. The 84-year-old former volunteer firefighter announced he would try to save the house. John Hall said goodbye to his wife and joined his father.

Howard and John Hall would spend 14 hours fighting one of four wildfires ignited and fanned by high winds on the Big Island on Aug. 8. The blaze is emblematic of the wildfire problem that now besets Hawaii. Their fire took hold soon after Maui's first fire was reported, one of



four that overtook that island, including the one that razed Lahaina and killed at least 115 people.

The Halls and others who fought the fire on their farm suspect that it, too, could have had horrific consequences. Waikoloa, Puako and Kawaihae are within 10 miles of their Lalamilo Farm Lots parcel. What lies between is mostly desiccated grassland.

Those settlements could well have been in range of a wildfire driven by winds amplified by Hurricane Dora as it churned south of Hawaii.

The winds grounded helicopters that could have helped. The fire would have moved too fast for bulldozers to keep up. The terrain to the south was too rough for firetrucks and tankers, and the firefighters were dealing with two other fires that day. So the father and son did what they could until support arrived.

"We did not know how it could play out," Howard Hall said. "Now, in light of Lahaina, we sit back and say 'Holy shit. It could have been another Lahaina'."

It's not a statement the former dean at Hawaii Preparatory Academy makes lightly, given his 60 years of experience with the increasingly perilous wildfire situation on the Big Island.

Hawaii Fire Department Chief Kazuo Todd says the winds that day might have pushed the fire toward Kawaihae, further north, though the behavior of the island's fires were so erratic that it could have gone elsewhere.

**Wise To Fire Risk**

The lion's share of Kohala's



Howard Hall, at right, was prepared for fire, in part because he has a network of hoses that make water available to much of his 14-acre property. (Thomas Heaton/Civil Beat/2023)

**Howard Hall, WH6EHJ, the monthly emergency siren test observer and reporter for Waimea, fought a fire on his farm in Lalamilo Farm Lots on the same day as the Lahaina fire.**

fire companies were dispatched to the district's northern reaches at 2:49 a.m. on Aug. 8 for the Big Island's first and largest fire of the day.

Firefighters would fight for hours to keep the flames from reaching the Kohala Ranch subdivision. By the time it was under control its footprint expanded to about 1,000 acres. It only damaged a few homes.

The Emergency Operations Center sent equipment and firefighters to North Kohala first. At 5:06 a.m., employees from the county's Department of Public Works reported the Hall's fire after seeing it from almost a mile away.

The island has an uncomfortable but increasingly intimate relationship with fire, with each year seeming to bring a new landmark.

The fires are fueled by climate change, persistent drought, invasive species and declining agricultural use, among other factors.

As a result, Hawaii county's firefighters have been gaining a greater understanding of wildfire, which they often fight alongside the military and foresters from the state Department of Land and Natural Resources. They depend on roads and highways as firebreaks, and use bulldozers to create new ones. In many cases, farmers get involved too.

Still, on Aug. 8, the fires across the island's western coast behaved in ways many firefighters had not encountered, according to fire chief Todd.

In the Halls' case, given Kohala's crews were already fighting a wildfire, units from Honokaa to Hilo were called in to help.



# WAIMEA FIRE

*From previous page*

So were cowboys from Parker Ranch, which has its own firefighting equipment and fire-trained employees. Two large dozers, provided by a county contractor, upturned the earth along the fence line to make a firebreak, a common practice on the Big Island.

"For any fire of appreciable size and speed, you need everything you can get your hands on," Todd said. "We're kind of land-locked and don't have the ability to bring on additional resources. So it's very difficult, here in Hawaii."

## Surrounded

By the time help arrived around 8 a.m., Howard and John Hall were virtually surrounded by fire.

It had consumed a line of trees planted as a windbreak along the property's northern edge, threatening the last line of trees before it headed for the Halls' house.

John Hall jumped the fence with a heavy, firefighting grade hose in hand, one of several his father installed around the farm and tried to fight it back. He continually looked over his shoulder, preparing for an escape.

If embers reached and ignited the second line of trees, the house would be next. Then it could have moved even further south.

Eventually, the father and son saw lights through the smoke, buoying their hope. Then they were hit by water. John Hall saw Parker Ranch's truck, which extinguished the fire in the line of trees.

The driver saw Hall "and throws me a shaka," he said. "We both laugh as we were standing amongst smoldering, no-longer-flaming debris. And it was right at that moment, I just broke down."

By midday there would be another flareup and the Halls, firefighters and cow-

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boys would continue to tamp it down.

Howard Hall says the farm was saved — not to mention the towns that might have been in the fire's path — thanks to the firefighters and Parker Ranch crew.

Over the course of the next evening, firefighters remained on the scene. Over the course of the following two weeks, Howard Hall remained on the property to stop any flareups and douse hot spots.

Almost two weeks after the fire, a crew responded to a flareup where the Halls believe the fire started — a power pole less than a mile north, where lines might have slapped together in the wind or been ripped from their moorings.

## Stewarding The Land

Sen. Tim Richards, who lives near the Kohala Ranch subdivision, says the fires in Lahaina and across the state have underscored what many

of his constituents already knew: Wildfire is a profound risk to the community.

Waikoloa Village has been threatened by wildfires several times in recent years. It has long been recognized as one of the state's most at-risk communities, given its surrounding dry landscape, windswept and laden with fire-prone vegetation. A Waikoloa Village committee has been dedicated to reducing the risk of wildfire since 2003. In 2005 the Hawaii Wildfire Management Organization built a 30-foot-wide firebreak along the village's northern edge — it saved the community a month after it was built.

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**Thomas Heaton is a reporter for Civil Beat. You can reach him by email at [theaton@civilbeat.org](mailto:theaton@civilbeat.org) or follow him on Twitter at [@thomasheaton](https://twitter.com/thomasheaton)**

## Volcano VERT Radio Check Net held on second Saturday of the month

Coordinator and net controller Doug Wilson, KH7DQ, invites all licensed amateur radio operators to participate in the Volcano VERT Radio Check Net on the second Saturday of each month.

The net starts promptly at **9 a.m. on the Volcano Repeater; 147.260 MHz; (pl 103.5 on the input only, i.e., transmit only).**

"At the end of the regular two-round format on the Volcano Repeater, we will QSY to our alternate repeater **442.150 MHz (Kulani Mauka; pl 100.0)** for roll call and signal reports. We will then close this portion of the Net and QSY to the Volcano VERT **146.490 MHz** simplex frequency," said Doug.

"On our Volcano VERT simplex frequency (**146.490 MHz**) we will do a roll call and exchange signal reports with each station until all stations on this frequency have been contacted. This will conclude the net.

"The purpose of this net is to 1) check our equipment, 2) test your ability to reach the Volcano Repeater, 3) check signals from various locations in the Volcano area and the East side of Hawaii Island, 4) have a short open discussion in a "normal" two-round net format, and 5) practice switching to our alternate emergency frequencies.

"Everyone should make sure that their radios are programmed with the above frequencies, offsets and pl tones."