

Summer Lee Haunani Sylva

EXECUTIVE LEADER • NATIVE HAWAIIAN RIGHTS ADVOCATE

EXPERIENCED LITIGATOR • PUBLIC-POLICY STRATEGIST

◆ EXECUTIVE PROFILE

Native Hawaiian executive leader, attorney, and public-policy strategist with more than 20 years of leadership, public-administration, legal, and governance experience across Native Hawaiian institutions, federal government, and community-serving organizations. Currently OHA's Interim Chief Executive Officer/Chief Administrator, leading more than 130 employees statewide and an executive leadership team in partnership with OHA's elected Board of Trustees, with responsibility for agency-wide operations and the stewardship of trust assets approaching \$1 billion. Former Executive Director of the Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation and Senior Advisor for Native Hawaiian Affairs at the U.S. Department of the Interior. Proven record of steadying and transforming mission-driven institutions; translating governance and policy into execution; strengthening people, systems, and financial capacity; navigating complex legal and public environments; and building durable partnerships. Known for principled, collaborative, and accountable leadership grounded in sound judgment, candor, humility, and kuleana.

◆ PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

OFFICE OF HAWAIIAN AFFAIRS — Honolulu, Hawai'i

Interim Chief Executive Officer / Chief Administrator

September 2025–Present

- ◆ **Lead OHA through institutional transition and strategic renewal**, overseeing more than 130 employees statewide, an Executive Leadership Team, agency-wide operations, and trust assets approaching \$1 billion; partner with the elected Board of Trustees to strengthen accountability, organizational performance, workforce capacity, and continuity.
- ◆ **Serve as a principal executive voice for OHA**, representing the institution before beneficiaries, elected officials, Native Hawaiian organizations, government and community leaders, and public audiences locally, nationally, and internationally through keynotes, panels, media interviews, policy briefings, and Native Hawaiian law trainings.
- ◆ **Lead advocacy and public engagement concerning military-leased Public Land Trust lands**, including statewide beneficiary listening sessions, OHA's 2026 Washington, D.C., delegation, and the Negotiation Permitted Interaction Group on expiring military leases; appointed to the Governor's Advisory Committee on Military-Leased Lands to advance outcomes reflecting environmental, cultural, fiduciary, and beneficiary interests.
- ◆ **Led \$6.1 million in emergency and disaster relief from strategy through execution**, directing partnerships with Hawaiian Council, state and county governments, and community providers while mobilizing cross-functional OHA teams to rapidly design, administer, and deliver assistance to beneficiaries.
- ◆ **Serve as a voting member and executive lead for the Malu Project**, working with Trustee leadership to establish a disciplined framework for stewarding \$55 million appropriated under Act 32 for critical short-term Native Hawaiian programs and services; support renewed OHA engagement on a durable resolution of its Public Land Trust revenue entitlement and the elevation of ea in strategic planning.
- ◆ **Advance land and housing strategies to expand OHA's mission impact**, directing Kaka'ako Makai commercial-development planning and community-based NHO co-management opportunities while facilitating the proposed transfer of approximately 171 acres at Kalaeuila from the City to OHA for up to \$2 million, against an estimated value of \$21 million.

Interim Director, Office of Human Resources

March–June 2026

- ◆ **Strengthened OHA's leadership pipeline and workforce capacity**, accelerating agency-wide recruitment and helping fill critical executive vacancies, including Chief Financial Officer, Land Director, and Human Resources Director.
- ◆ **Modernized workforce systems and reinforced accountability**, formalizing agency-wide performance evaluation and merit-increase processes, streamlining performance-improvement and disciplinary practices, resolving longstanding personnel matters, and advancing manager training and professional development.

Chief of Staff to the Board of Trustees

March–September 2025

- ◆ **Strengthened Board governance and Board-Administration alignment**, leading structured review of OHA's Bylaws, Executive Policy Manual, and Employee Handbook to clarify roles, improve transparency, and support effective institutional decision-making.
- ◆ **Translated Board priorities into organization-wide action**, helping advance the biennium budget, long-overdue agency-wide salary increases, paid family leave and telework, OHA's real-estate plans, and the Board's Alaka'i Award Program.
- ◆ **Strengthened organizational culture and next-generation leadership**, advancing the return of 'Aha 'Ōpio and OHA's Washington, D.C., Congressional Fellowship while supporting recruitment, morale, and stronger coordination among Trustees, Administration, and executive leadership.
- ◆ **Expanded OHA's national and international relationships**, supporting engagements with Native Hawaiian and Indigenous leaders in Hawai'i, the continental United States, and French Polynesia.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR — Washington, D.C.*Senior Advisor for Native Hawaiian Affairs*

Oct. 2021–Feb. 2025

Senior Multicultural Advisor, FEMA

Aug. 2023–Aug. 2024

- ◆ **Advised Secretary Deb Haaland and Department leadership** on complex Native Hawaiian rights, resources, policy, legislative, intergovernmental, and organizational matters.
- ◆ **Implemented the Department's first Native Hawaiian Community Consultation Policy**, strengthening recognition of the federal government's special political and trust relationship with the Native Hawaiian Community.
- ◆ **Directed deployment of \$25 million in Inflation Reduction Act funding** for Indigenous-led, Indigenous-centered, and Indigenous-informed climate-resilience and adaptation initiatives serving Hawai'i.
- ◆ **Advanced Native Hawaiian inclusion in federal initiatives** involving consultation, co-stewardship, Native language renormalization, international trade, and Indigenous knowledge.
- ◆ **Served as a senior FEMA advisor during the Maui wildfire response and recovery**, leading intergovernmental coordination, Native Hawaiian consultation, survivor engagement, risk communications, and cross-sector policy and program implementation.

NATIVE HAWAIIAN LEGAL CORPORATION — Honolulu, Hawai'i*Executive Director*

Nov. 2019–Oct. 2021

Interim Executive Director

Aug.–Nov. 2019

- ◆ **Served as chief administrator and executive officer of a statewide Native Hawaiian nonprofit**, reporting to its Board of Directors; led 15+ attorneys and legal professionals and managed an approximately \$2 million operating budget and \$1 million investment portfolio.
- ◆ **Led strategic planning and organizational transformation**, assessing and realigning programs, grants, revenue, staffing, technology, operations, and community engagement.
- ◆ **Achieved NHLC's first fiscal surplus in ten years** while strengthening legal services, funding, technology, employee compensation and benefits, grant development, community partnerships, and organizational systems.
- ◆ **Directed high-impact litigation and public-policy advocacy** involving Native Hawaiian land, water, public-trust obligations, cultural resources, traditional and customary practices, and natural-resource protections.

- ◆ **Served as NHLC’s principal spokesperson and advocate** before courts, government agencies, policymakers, community organizations, funders, and other stakeholders.

Senior Staff Attorney

Jan. 2014–July 2019

- ◆ **Led complex Native Hawaiian rights litigation**, including water rights, public trust, land, cultural resources, and government entitlement matters; served as lead counsel before state and county agencies and administrative bodies.
- ◆ **Secured significant Hawai’i appellate victories** protecting water resources, traditional and customary practices, cultural sites, and public trust obligations.

◆ **EARLIER LEGAL & ADMINISTRATIVE EXPERIENCE**

Bays, Lung, Rose & Holma — Litigation Associate | 2011–2013

Holland & Knight LLP — Litigation Associate | 2007–2011

Research Corporation of the University of Hawai’i — Research Administrator, Cancer Research Center of Hawai’i | 2001–2004

- ◆ Earlier experience includes complex civil litigation, regulatory and corporate compliance, financial/investment matters, federal grant applications, budgets and contracts, personnel supervision, research administration, and institutional stakeholder coordination.

◆ **GOVERNANCE & LEADERSHIP**

Native Hawaiian Bar Association — President, 2019–Oct. 2024; Past President and Board of Directors, 2013–Present

Waimānalo Health Center — Board Secretary, Board of Directors, 2000–2004

- ◆ Additional leadership includes the Council for Native Hawaiian Advancement Board; Hawai’i State Bar Association Diversity, Equity & Access to the Law Committee; Hawai’i Consortium of Legal Services Providers; Governor’s Advisory Committee on Military-Leased Lands; and 2026 Honolulu Charter Commission.

◆ **EDUCATION**

Cornell Law School — J.D., Public Law Certificate, 2007

Barnard College, Columbia University — B.S., Political Science, 1997

◆ **CORE COMPETENCIES**

Executive & Board Leadership ◆ Strategic Planning & Execution ◆ Organizational Transformation ◆ Public Trust & Fiduciary Stewardship ◆ Financial & Asset Oversight ◆ Talent & Leadership Development ◆ Government & Legislative Relations ◆ Native Hawaiian Policy & Advocacy ◆ Community Engagement ◆ Coalition Building ◆ Risk & Compliance ◆ Crisis & Disaster Response ◆