

**Saving Kahalu‘u Bay,
Rebuilding Community
Prepared by The Kohala Center
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PROJECT DESCRIPTION

In the last six months, something remarkable has been happening at Kahalu‘u Bay. In the old pavilion and on a monthly basis, Kumu Sam Kama and his family teach the craft of weaving to *kamaaina* kids and to visitors from the mainland. Kauwila plays Hawaiian music, and impromptu performances by volunteers grace the rather forlorn facilities. ReefTeachers—girls from Girl Scout Troop 425 and adults from all walks of life—reach out to visitors, informing them how to enter the water and how to preserve the fragile coral environment. Lunch is shared in generous proportions. It’s a local thing. It’s family thing. It’s about enjoying the diversity of Island life and about caring for the land. And it has been missing for a long time.

Over the years Kahalu‘u Bay has suffered under the impact of heavy usage. According to a County lifeguard and UH Sea Grant Program count, the Bay experiences over 400,000 users a year—just during the peak daylight hours. Not only is the coral reef at Kahalu‘u threatened, but a beach area once favored by Island families has fallen into disrepair and overuse. This precious area of key cultural, natural, and social significance has been neglected for far too long.

With leadership and planning inspired by the UH Sea Grant Program, with support from the Girl Scouts, and now with the support of at least 60 volunteers and Island families, the effort to reclaim the Bay has started. The environment is being actively monitored and preserved; local families are sharing their knowledge and their lunches with visitors; visitors are learning how to respectfully encounter the coral reef. Civic pride is reappearing with the initial cosmetic upgrade to the existing pavilion.

Change can happen, and it can happen in ways that are visible, that build bridges across diverse communities, and that allow Hawaiians to reclaim and share cultural resources. This change has been initiated by the Kahalu‘u Bay Project, a public-private partnership of many Island entities, overseen by a citizen advisory committee and managed by The Kohala Center. Participating organizations currently include:

- Hawai‘i Tourism Authority (HTA)
- County of Hawai‘i Department of Parks and Recreation
- Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR)
- For the Sea Productions
- Kamehameha Investment Corporation
- National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)
- Kona-Kohala Chamber of Commerce
- National Park Service Ala Kahakai National Historic Trail
- Outrigger Keauhou Beach Resort
- University of Hawai‘i Sea Grant
- West Hawai‘i Explorations Academy
- West Hawai‘i Girl Scouts.

Approximately 90 community members have already volunteered their time in 2007.

With seed funding provided by Kamehameha Investment Corporation, HTA and NOAA, The Kahalu‘u Bay Project has created the outline for a 15-year effort to honor Kahalu‘u Bay by restoring its natural beauty, caring for its natural resources, and creating a center for cultural education, scientific research, and community recreation. The vision is a gathering place where traditional Hawaiians’ relationship to land and sea is embodied and shared with residents and visitors of all ages.

In the past six months the advisory group, under the leadership of Cindi Punihaole, has already implemented the following activities:

- Expansion of ReefTeach, an on-going, on-site program to save the near shore environment by teaching reef etiquette and emphasizing the importance of coral reefs to marine ecology

- The professional design of three signs to be installed at the Park by September 2007 to halt coral trampling and re-introduce cultural protocols for entering the Bay
- Monthly cultural/educational events that bring local families and visitors to the park to share information and community-building activities
- Water quality monitoring and other baseline environmental studies
- Painting of the main pavilion by over 60 volunteers—including homeless “residents” of the Park—and the placement and maintenance of containers for recycling cans and bottles.

Kahalu‘u Bay is too important to neglect. *Kupuna*, scientists, educators, and local families are asking us to restore this place to its former beauty and to reestablish respect for its cultural significance. We are now seeking funding that will allow the work at Kahalu‘u to continue. ***Approximately \$200,000 in 2007-8 will be needed for the following activities:***

- On-going support for a full-time Kahalu‘u Bay Project Coordinator, a ReefTeach Assistant, and a water quality monitoring consultant
- A feasibility study for the restoration of sand to the beach
- Cleaning and restoration of the fish pond, including rebuilding rock walls
- Design and installation of additional educational signage
- County support for a Park Ranger program to enforce existing rules that regulate people’s behavior in the park and on the reef
- A design process that brings together cultural experts, environmental engineers, interpretive designers, and architects to complete a physical plan for future restoration/improvements.

Proposed activities for 2009-14 will include:

- Implementation of findings from the study of beach sand and rock wall removal
- Design for a new set of cultural and recreational facilities set back from the shoreline
- Removal of existing buildings and construction of appropriate new facilities that provide a Hawaiian sense of place

- On-going staffing to manage the new facilities and coordinate cultural events and marine education
- Development of a formal non-profit organization that would serve as a “Friends of Kahalu‘u” to participate in the planning process, guide and coordinate future activities with a view to community-based economic development that encourages families with ancestral ties to Kahalu‘u to work in partnership with the County to manage park resources, provide maintenance, manage concessions and provide other services at the park to benefit the Kahalu‘u area via the P&R Partnerships in the Park Program.

THE KOHALA CENTER

The Kohala Center is an independent, not-for-profit environmental studies institute with a mission to respectfully engage the Island of Hawai‘i as a living laboratory for humanity. Operating at the intersection of culture, science, and community, The Kohala Center accomplishes its work through partnerships, developing cutting edge research and teaching programs and then involving Island K-12 students in these programs. In addition to working with the University of Hawai‘i, Hawai‘i Community College, the Kamehameha Schools, the Hawai‘i State Department of Education, the Edith Kanaka‘ole Foundation, and Na Kalai Wa‘a Moku o Hawai‘i, The Kohala Center has initiated projects with Brown University, Cornell University, the University of California at Santa Barbara, the University of Minnesota, and Yale University, among others.

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