

SAVING KAHALU'U BAY
REBUILDING COMMUNITY
PREPARED BY THE KOHALA CENTER
FEBRUARY 2008

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

In the last year, 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 *kama'aina* kids and to visitors from the mainland. Ulele Wai Hui 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 a 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 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 over 60 volunteers and Island families, the effort to reclaim the Bay continues. 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
- Bishop Holdings Corporation/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 120 community members have already volunteered their time in 2007- 08.

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 implemented the following activities:

- Continued 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 and installation of three signs at the park in September 2007 to halt coral trampling and re-introduce cultural protocols for entering the Bay;
- Cultural/educational events that bring local families and visitors to the park to share information and community-building activities;
- The first annual Bay Concert to Save and Restore Kahalu'u Bay;
- Water quality monitoring and other baseline environmental studies.
- Created several Reef Teach Outreach programs:
 1. Reef Teach "Adopt A Day at Kahalu'u Bay" is a program whereby businesses can adopt a day to Reef Teach at Kahalu'u—one day a week, one day a month or one day a year. To date, the Fair Wind and the Keauhou Beach Resort, Jack's Diving Locker, the Mayor's Office in Kona,

and the high school at the University of the Nations have Adopted A Day.

2. Reef Teach "Train the Trainer" program takes our training session to businesses within our community. Businesses are trained in Reef Etiquette and are able to educate their customers on reef etiquette. The program has been rolled out to The Kohala Divers at Kawaihae.
3. Outreach presentation programs to enlighten the public on the Kahalu'u Bay Project. Presentations have been given at The Kona Township Community Meeting and at the Keauhou Homeowner's Association through Kamehameha Investment Corporation.
4. Working with the Hilo Bay Watershed Advisory Group to bring expanded Reef Teach to the Hilo area.

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 \$300,000 in 2008 -09 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.
- Working with an ocean engineering firm for the restoration of the beach area.
- Cleaning and restoration of the fish pond, including rebuilding rock walls.
- Creation of a master plan for future park restoration/improvements by university students with input from the community. 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.

Proposed activities for 2009-14 include:

- Bringing together cultural experts, environmental engineers, interpretive designers, and architects to implement the master plan for future restoration/improvements.
- 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, Yale University, and the Mellon Foundation, among others.

For more information, please contact:

Cindi Punihaoale at cpunihaoale@kohalacenter.org

or

Betsy Cole at cole@kohalacenter.org.

They both can be reached at The Kohala Center, 808.887.6411.



The Kohala Center | P.O. Box 437462 | Kamuela, Hawai'i 96743 |
Tel.808-887-6411 | Fax.808-885-6707 | www.kohalacenter.org