THE KOHALA CENTER
education. environment. empowerment.

Saving Kahaluʻu Bay
Rebuilding Community

Prepared by The Kohala Center
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Project Description

A remarkable thing is happening at Kahaluʻu Bay. It's a local thing. It's a family thing. It's about caring for the land—about residents and businesses working to preserve Hawaiʻi's natural environment and to Save Kahaluʻu Bay.

A Brief History

Over the years, Kahaluʻu Bay—a tiny and precious area of key cultural, natural, and social significance and a premier reef encounter site—has suffered from heavy usage. This popular Kona snorkeling and surfing area experiences over 400,000 users a year—nearly twice as many users per water acre as at the more protected Hanauma Bay on Oʻahu. Not only was the Kahaluʻu coral reef and marine environment threatened, but a beach area once favored by island families fell into disrepair and overuse.

But change can happen. In 2001, the University of Hawaiʻi Sea Grant Extension agent in West Hawaiʻi initiated educational presentations at Kahaluʻu Bay by volunteer ReefTeachers. The ReefTeach program was successful, and data collected during and immediately after each teaching session revealed that trampling damage caused by bay users standing on living coral was significantly reduced.

Kahaluʻu Bay Project

In 2006, The Kohala Center, a privately-funded, independent academic institute for environmental studies, stepped forward to facilitate the continuing community-driven efforts to protect Kahaluʻu Bay. In two short years, through Cindi Punihaole's efforts (Cindi is The Kohala Center's public outreach and volunteer coordinator), the effort at the bay has grown into an enormous success: there are now over 230 volunteers and over three dozen local businesses engaged in saving Kahaluʻu Bay.

Through the Kahaluʻu Bay Project, island residents are reclaiming the bay and island businesses are empowered to protect an important economic and natural asset.

It is about *education.* It's about the *environment.* And it's about *empowerment.*

Through *education* the community is *empowered* to care for the *environment*—Kahaluʻu Bay, our island, and our planet. Programs at Kahaluʻu empower island residents with the very best information and independent analyses.

Current Projects

- The **Kahalu'u Bay Master Plan** honors 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. With seed funding provided by Kamehameha Investment Corporation, HTA and NOAA, and working with the University of Washington's Department of Landscape Architecture and the County of Hawai'i Planning Department, the master plan was developed during the 2008 community design process. 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. Long-term plans include reorienting vehicle and pedestrian traffic flow, removing an old pavilion and retaining wall, restoring the beach area, and building a cultural-educational facility at the park.
- **ReefTeach,** the popular ongoing, on-site program to save the nearshore environment by teaching reef etiquette and emphasizing the importance of coral reefs to marine ecology, continues to expand, along with its supporting programs, Adopt a Day at Kahalu'u Bay and Train the Trainer.
- The **Ecosystem Health Project** furthers our understanding of the connection of terrestrial and ocean environments through monitoring the nearshore environment of Kahalu'u Bay. Marine life surveys of the bay will determine whether conservation efforts are succeeding and what threats might be developing that affect the environmental quality in the bay.
- **Citizen Science** is an important component of the Ecosystem Health Project. Volunteers and students—citizen scientists—are trained and supervised by science professionals, to collect scientifically defensible data.
- **Cultural preservation** and the *sense of place* links the history and culture of Kahalu'u with environmental restoration efforts. The history of Kahalu'u and Keauhou and life stories of kūpuna who lived here are recorded and shared thanks to a Preserve America Grant from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Grant monies were used to co-produce a cultural brochure on the ahupua'a of Kahalu'u and Keauhou and to capture on DVD the area's history and life stories of kūpuna.
- The **Puana Ka 'Ike** history and culture lecture series and the **La 'Ike** science and culture series strengthens and deepens the native understanding of our natural environment. Kahalu'u is about empowering ourselves with indigenous knowledge and Western science.
- The **Bay Concert** in November 2008 was sold out with over 900 people in attendance. The 2009 concert is already scheduled for November 21 at the Sheraton Keauhou Bay Resort and Spa Convention Center, and features Na Hoku award winners Na Leo Pilimehana and Ho'okena with emcee Frank DeLima and the Daifukuji Taiko Drummers.

Outreach and awareness programs have shared the vision of Save Kahaluʻu with:

- the Coral Reef Task Force conference at Kahaluʻu, Kona, where scientists and experts on reef ecology attended a one-week conference to share information on how to take care of our reefs;
- the Hilo Bay Watershed Advisory Group, sharing our ReefTeach program at Kahaluʻu Bay;
- Richard Columbo of Associated Press' Eco and Sustainable Tourism program, which aired in October 2008 to over 200 TV channels around the world;
- the viewers of KHNL's "The Earth and Sea Project: Going Green in Hawaiʻi"; and
- Preserving Paradise, a guide by Kirsten Whatley on volunteering for Hawaiʻi's environment.

Future Projects

Although the project's early and continued success is heartening, we've just begun. There is much more to be done to Save Kahaluʻu Bay from overuse and to rescue the beach park from disrepair, including:

- ongoing support for a full-time Kahaluʻu Bay Project Coordinator, a ReefTeach Assistant, and a water quality monitoring consultant. Ongoing staffing to manage the new facilities and to coordinate cultural events and marine education;
- engaging an ocean engineering firm to restore the beach area;
- cleaning and restoring the fish pond, including rebuilding rock walls;
- County support for a Park Ranger program to encourage reef etiquette in the park and on the reef;
- continued planning and implementation of physical improvements to Kahaluʻu Beach Park as funds and County and State regulations permit;
- development of a formal nonprofit "Friends of Kahaluʻu" organization to participate in the planning process, guide, and coordinate future activities that fosters community-based economic development and encourages families with ancestral ties to Kahaluʻu 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 Kahaluʻu area via the Parks & Recreation Partnerships in the Park Program.

To learn more about the Kahaluʻu Bay Project, restoration, the culture and history of the area, ReefTeach and other programs, visit www.kohalacenter.org/kahaluubay/about.

<u>Kahaluʻu Bay Project organizations</u>:

Hawaiʻi Tourism Authority (HTA)

Bill Healy Foundation

Charles Annenberg Weingarten

County of Hawaiʻi Department of Research and Development

County of Hawaiʻi Department of Parks and Recreation

County of Hawaiʻi Department of Planning

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

Keauhou Beach Resort

University of Hawaiʻi Sea Grant

West Hawaiʻi Explorations Academy

High School of the Pacific

Innovations School

Full Life Center

West Hawaiʻi Girl Scouts

Kealakehe Intermediate School