

For Immediate Release

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Preserving paradise at Kahalu‘u Bay

KAMUELA, Hawaii—October 13, 2008—Preservation efforts at Kahalu‘u Bay have been receiving deserved attention recently. The latest comes as an entry in *Preserving Paradise*, a guide by Kirsten Whatley to volunteering for Hawaii’s environment.

The 164-page guide, published by Island Heritage, invites readers to give a hand—and their time and the goodness of their heart—alongside folks who give back to these islands that offer so much.

The guide includes the ReefTeach program at Kahalu‘u as one of 14 Hawaii Island volunteer opportunities, describing ReefTeach as the “volunteer program facilitated by The Kohala Center to help people protect Hawaii’s coral reefs.” Currently more than 200 volunteers ReefTeach residents and visitors to care for the environment while enjoying the popular surfing and snorkeling bay.

ReefTeach is one initiative in the Save Kahalu‘u Bay Project, a 15-year effort to restore Kahalu‘u Bay and Beach Park to its former beauty, care for its natural resources, and reestablish respect for its cultural significance with the development of a center for cultural education, scientific research and community recreation. The program began in 2006 with seed funding provided by Kamehameha Investment Corporation, Hawaii Tourism Authority and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and is a public-private partnership of many island entities, overseen by a citizen advisory committee and managed by The Kohala Center.

The project is already gaining national and statewide recognition through:

- KHNL’s Sea and Earth segment last spring (www.khnl.com/Global/story.asp?S=8281890)
- The Associated Press “Horizons” Hawaii Island ecotourism segment produced by Richard Columbo who visited in September
- *Ho‘iho‘i Kūlana Wahi Pana* (Restoring Sacred Places) brochure posted on the NOAA Web site (www.sanctuaries.noaa.gov/about/pacific.html)
- University of Washington’s UWeek article on UW student participation in Kahalu‘u master plan development (www.kohalacenter.org/news)
- Promotion and support for the Bay Concert, a benefit for Kahalu‘u on November 22 in Keauhou (www.kohalacenter.org/bayconcert08)
- Presentations by Outreach and Volunteer Coordinator Cindi Punihaole, including to the United States Coral Reef Task Force, Hilo Bay Watershed Advisory Group, the Hawaii Institute for Marine Biology, NOAA, and the Coastal Zone Management Federal and State Team.

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Preserving paradise at Kahalu‘u Bay, page 2

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To learn more about ReefTeach and how to volunteer or for other Save Kahalu‘u projects, see www.kohalacenter.org/kahaluubay.

The Kohala Center is an independent, not-for-profit center for research and education *about* and *for* the environment. By respectfully engaging Hawai‘i Island as the world’s most vibrant classroom and laboratory for humanity, The Kohala Center builds teaching and research programs that enhance island environments, serve island communities, and advance the work of the academy. The Kohala Center operates in partnership with local, national, and international research and educational institutions. Among its current project partners are Hawaii Community College, the Edith Kanaka‘ole Foundation, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, Kamehameha Schools, the University of Hawaii, Brown University, Cornell University, the Redlands Institute, the School of Forestry and Environmental Studies at Yale University, the University of California at Santa Barbara, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, among many others. See www.kohalacenter.org/.

Kahalu‘u Bay Project Keauhou, Hawai‘i Island

Over the years, Kahalu‘u Bay—an area of key cultural, natural, and social significance—has suffered from heavy usage. This popular Kona snorkeling and surfing area experiences over 400,000 users a year. Not only was the coral reef and marine environment at Kahalu‘u threatened, but a beach area once favored by island families fell into disrepair and overuse.

In the last year, something remarkable has happened at Kahalu‘u Bay. Island residents are reclaiming the bay and saving it from destruction, and island businesses are feeling empowered to protect an important economic and natural asset.

The Kahalu‘u Bay Project. 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—Kahalu‘u Bay and our island planet. Programs at Kahalu‘u empower island residents with the very best information and independent analyses.

- Our **ReefTeach** program changes the behavior of beachgoers at Kahalu‘u Bay. Residents and visitors learn to care for the environment while enjoying the bay. Our studies show that when beachgoers have been ReefTaught by one of the more than 200 volunteer ReefTeachers, their behaviors change in very positive ways.
- For example, our in-water monitoring shows that beachgoers who have been ReefTaught stand or touch the coral for less than 10 seconds, whereas people who have not been taught may stand on or touch the coral for 60 to 120 seconds.
- Over three dozen community businesses support the Kahalu‘u Bay Project, some of them even pay their employees to participate in ReefTeach through the Project’s Adopt-a-Day program, an exceptional example of believing in the environment as a vital economic asset. Two businesses have even sent 20 of their employees to our Train the Trainers program. Those employees are now teaching guests at their businesses how to enjoy the bay, while protecting it.
- This public outreach effort is rapidly converting into an Ecosystem Health Project, which furthers our understanding of the connection of terrestrial and ocean environments through monitoring the near shore environment of Kahalu‘u Bay.
- Citizen Science will be an important component of the Ecosystem Health Project. Volunteers and students, citizen scientists, will be trained and supervised by science professionals, so that scientifically defensible data can be collected.

- The *sense of place* is being honored at Kahalu‘u Bay by linking the history and culture of Kahalu‘u with environmental restoration efforts.

Kahalu‘u is about empowering ourselves with **indigenous knowledge and Western science**. 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 *fun*. The community gathers in November for the music and festivities of the Bay Concert, a benefit to save and restore Kahalu‘u Bay. www.kohalacenter.org/bayconcert08/

The Kahalu‘u Bay Project is a public-private partnership of many island entities, overseen by a citizen advisory committee and managed by The Kohala Center. The Kohala Center is an independent center for research and education *about* and *for* the environment. The Center very respectfully engages the Island of Hawai‘i as the world's most vibrant research and learning laboratory, and partners with island experts and experts from universities and research agencies that operate in the national and international arena, like Cornell University and Yale University, to assist communities on Hawai‘i Island, in the Pacific and around the world to thrive—ecologically, economically, culturally, and socially.

To learn more about the remarkable efforts at Kahalu‘u, contact Cindi Punahaole, outreach and volunteer coordinator, The Kohala Center, cpunahaole@kohalacenter.org, 808-895-1010, and visit “Current Programs and Events” at www.kohalacenter.org.

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