

Cleaning Kahaluu

Two dozen volunteers remove garbage at beach

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"My hands are full of cigarettes. Look at how much there is ... look ... There's so much cigarettes over here," said Justin Kenoi, 9, as he brought handfuls of cigarette butts, bottle caps and other refuse found strewn about Kahaluu Beach Park to a large garbage bag.

Not exactly the statement beachgoers want to hear coming from a child's mouth as they bask in the sun, enjoying the smell of the ocean and the sound of small waves rolling into the bay.

Hands adorned with green latex gloves began sifting through the sand, picking out chunks of glass, bottle caps, cigarette butts and other refuse that didn't quite make it to trash receptacles to help clean up Kahaluu on Saturday morning.

"From my observing more people come here than other beaches and there's more rubbish and sometimes the people just don't know what the place should look like or how to treat it," said 9-year-old Lauryn Chung, a fourth-grader at Hookena Elementary School. "Smokers and beer drinkers just leave their butts and bottle caps all over -- It's like they're just too lazy to get up and throw it away."

About 25 people attended "La Ike Day at Kahaluu Bay" Saturday morning at the park's main pavilion. Mayor Billy Kenoi, along with his family, joined in the day helping community members clean up the 4 acre county park. A conceptual master plan compiled in 2008 for restoring the park was also available for community members to peruse.

"People need to realize that keeping Hawaii clean is all our responsibility. It's easy to say government should be solely responsible for keeping the beaches clean but the park is really our park," Mayor Kenoi said. "We need to stop stepping over the trash and leave it a little nicer than we found it."

While volunteers spent 10 or 15 minutes plucking refuse from the sand, Chung found a spot near a pavilion where she discovered trash stuffed into rock walls and the small pavilion's steps and foundation.

"People like to hide the rubbish in the walls and under rocks -- like it's just going to magically make the rubbish disappear," she said.

Mayor Kenoi walked around the park, crouching beneath picnic tables, grabbing trash and other items not natural to the beach.

"I want my children to grow up knowing that before you go out swimming that you take a little extra time to clean up the beach," Kenoi said.

The June 2008 conceptual master plan for the park strives to restore the beach area to the specifications of a map drawn by Henry E.D. Kekahuna in 1957, which shows the beach area, heiau and Waikuaaala Pond at their original sizes before storms in the mid-1980s pushed sand toward Alii Drive partially filling in an area of the pond, said Cindi Punihale, public outreach and volunteer coordinator with the Kohala Center.

The large, stone and concrete wall that runs across the beach, originally intended to help deter erosion, would likely be removed should studies find that the wall has been undermined and has contributed to erosion in the bay.

The fence separating the park from the Outrigger Keauhou Beach Resort is slated to be removed, giving beachgoers access to the ponds and cultural sites in the area, she said.

The plan also calls to move the parking lot at the beach to the parking lot area owned by Kamehameha Investments, just mauka of the hotel. The current parking area would become a lawn with an imu.

For Chung, cleaning up the beach comes down to preparing for the future. Even at age 9, she understands how quickly an area like Kahaluu Beach can disappear.



Liam Kenoi, 11, tosses some caution tape and other garbage he found at Kahaluu Beach Park into a garbage bag Saturday morning. His mother, Takako Kenoi, assists. - Chelsea Jensen | West Hawaii Today

"If you don't start taking care of the beaches now then later on you will have bad habits and you won't have these good resources," she said. "All the colorful fish and ono, yummy fish we have wouldn't be here. Everything would be gone -- this is all we have."