

Resource Protection – Management of Unencumbered State Lands

Problem Statement

MACZAC has identified the problem of insufficient protection of cultural and natural resources on unencumbered or unmanaged state-owned lands within the Special Management Area.

This issue was raised during public testimony at the August 2004 meeting of MACZAC in Hilo. State land near Cape Kumukahi on the Big Island, under control of the University of Hawai'i, contains burial crypts and access roads that lead to other burial features in adjacent land. Increasing visitation by tourists as well as local residents has exposed these features to repeated desecration. Despite citizen complaints, neither UH, the State DLNR Land Management Division, nor the DLNR State Historic Preservation Division has taken significant steps to protect—or even properly identify and locate—these important cultural features.

Cape Kumukahi is not alone in this apparent lack of management. Kaena Point on O'ahu was once in this situation, with trash and damage to the dune ecosystem by offroaders, before its designation as a Natural Area Reserve. The state owns beach areas which are land banked with little or no formal resource management in place. Until funds are available to develop these areas as parks or to designate them as specially protected areas (e.g., Natural Area Reserve or Marine Life Conservation District), they are subject to continued vandalism and resource degradation. As coastal resources are increasingly threatened by development and population growth, our state seems to fall further and further behind in the dedication of adequate funding and manpower for natural and cultural resource management and protection. Existing state parks are woefully under-funded; therefore, the likelihood of unencumbered land receiving any meaningful support is very low.

Recommendation

New approaches are needed to empower community and special interest groups to develop kuleana for these resources. The Makai Watch program should be strengthened and expanded to include provision for this type of stewardship, which is most likely to be successful if it is ahupua'a-based and led by local cultural experts and others respected for their expertise.