

Sanford Service Center at Leilani Quarry – Second EIS Preparation Notice

Virtual Public Scoping Meeting

Date: March 4, 2025

TRANSCRIPT:

All right, it is now 6:03 PM. Hopefully we will have some more people join later, but in the interest of everyone's evening, let's go ahead and get started.

Welcome, everyone, to the scoping meeting for Sanford Service Center Leilani Quarry in Puna District, East Hawai'i. We have a lot of information to cover tonight, so let's dive in. Before we get into the content, I would like to bring a few general procedures to your attention.

We request that everyone please hold their comments throughout the presentation, as there will be a comment section at the end for those who wish to speak. Please remain muted throughout the presentation to minimize background noise. Please also note that this meeting is being recorded per Hawai'i Administrative Rules § 11-200.1, and this recording will be provided with the publication of the Draft EIS.

Let me start by introducing the Group 70 team. Group 70 is a local business with designers, architects, engineers, and planners providing services across a wide variety of work statewide. We are supporting Sanford Service Center in their upcoming Environmental Impact Statement, which includes the published EIS Preparation Notice and tonight's scoping meeting.

I am Irene Nichols Ferguson, a planner with G70. Joining me tonight are Ethan McCown, senior planner, and Kawika McKeague, our principal planner and the planner in charge of this project.

Before we get into the specifics of the project, I will provide a brief overview of the EIS process for those who may be unfamiliar.

The EIS process is governed by Hawai'i Administrative Rules HAR § 11-200.1 and Hawai'i Revised Statutes Chapter 343, collectively known as HEPA — the Hawai'i Environmental Policy Act. HAR § 11-200.1-23 requires public scoping meetings, the purpose of which is to gather public feedback on what will become the Draft EIS. This includes comments regarding the proposed action, which we will discuss later; alternatives to be analyzed in the EIS; and any potential impacts to environmental resources that the EIS will examine.

This is our second scoping meeting for this project, as we extended the scoping comment period to facilitate further public and agency engagement.

If there are any comments pertaining to these three subjects, we would greatly appreciate receiving them. Please remember that there will be an opportunity to provide oral comments at the end of the presentation.

There may be some confusion for those who learned about this EIS Preparation Notice through the Environmental Review Program's publication, as a withdrawal notice was also published in January. For context: a first EISPN was previously published in July of 2019 for the same proposed action. Shortly after that publication, amendments to HAR § 11-200 were made effective on August 9, 2019. One of those amendments — HAR § 11-200.1-4 — stipulated that actions or projects begun under the previous rules may continue to follow those older rules if completed within five years of the new rules' effective date. Because a Draft EIS was never completed for the original EISPN, and it has been well over five years since the new rules took effect, the EIS process had to be restarted. This includes a new EISPN, another public scoping meeting, a Draft EIS, and a subsequent Final EIS. The new second EISPN was therefore published under the rules of HAR § 11-200.1.

Hopefully that clears up any confusion regarding the publication of a second EISPN. Any further procedural questions are welcome at the end of the presentation.

Now let's take a moment to provide some background on the business G70 is supporting.

Sanford Service Center is a local business that conducts mining and quarrying activities on a 30-acre portion of the petition area — known as Leilani Quarry. We will discuss the petition area in depth and provide images for reference throughout the presentation. Sanford Service Center employs between 25 and 30 people, supporting local individuals and families in East Hawai'i and Puna. Leilani Quarry operates entirely on privately owned land, and Sanford Service Center is a multigenerational family business that has been in operation since 1977.

The product sourced at Leilani Quarry is an important low-density, black-colored, porous cinder — commonly called "popcorn cinder." The land at Leilani Quarry is geologically young, formed largely from the cooling and condensation of magma. These specific geological conditions allow for the formation of this distinctive cinder. The cinder is essential to the horticultural and nursery industry as a growing medium, possessing several highly beneficial properties that promote plant growth.

When you visit your local nursery, Home Depot, or Walmart and pick up a potted tropical flower, rose, fern, or similar plant, the growing medium will likely contain at least 25% black popcorn cinder — and there is a strong possibility that cinder came from Sanford Service Center's Leilani Quarry. This is especially true on Hawai'i Island, but is also highly likely across the state. To put a monetary value to this: the total value of crops, including nursery crops, in the County of Hawai'i was estimated at over \$500 million in 2022. We can therefore state with confidence that Sanford Service Center provides an essential product that positively contributes to economic growth in the County and State of Hawai'i.

Here is a map showing the location of Leilani Quarry. This is Hawai'i Island, zoomed in on Puna District. The petition area is the yellow-outlined shape, and this is the area the EIS will be primarily focused on. Directly above the petition area is Leilani Estates. Fissure 8 is also visible on this map — those who remember the 2018 volcanic activity will recall that the

bulk of the eruptions occurred at Fissure 8. The broader shape outlined in black is the privately owned TMK parcel within which the petition area sits. Looking closely at the upper portion of the petition area, you can see areas of dark discoloration — those are the locations where mining and quarrying activities actually occur.

It is also important to ensure participants understand how operations at Sanford Service Center are conducted. The EISPN uses the term "mining and quarrying activities," but a more accurate description of the quarry's operations would be excavation and grading. There is no heavy machinery strip-mining deep into the ground — all excavation stays fairly surface-level. The cinder is excavated and then filtered through screens. No blasting is performed, no rock crusher is used, and there are no heavy vibrations from rock being broken up. Sanford Service Center has no intentions of increasing the heavy machinery at Leilani Quarry as a result of the proposed action. As for site traffic, only approximately six gravel trucks travel in and out of Leilani Quarry per day to remove the cinder, and that number is not expected to increase under the proposed action.

The following images show Leilani Quarry. The center image shows Pu'u Kali'u in the background and the surface plain from which cinder is excavated. The left image shows the excavator used to access and remove the cinder. The right image shows the product — cinder after excavation and screening — illustrating the fine texture of the black popcorn cinder, the same material found as growing medium in potted nursery plants.

Now let's discuss the proposed action.

Every EIS analyzes a proposed action. In this case, the proposed action is the change of the State Land Use District within the petition area, with the approval of a special permit from the State Land Use Commission (LUC). When the LUC is petitioned to change conservation lands to any other district — including agricultural — it triggers the requirement to complete an environmental review, which in this case is an Environmental Impact Statement.

For reference, there are four State Land Use Districts under Hawai'i state policy: Urban, Rural, Agricultural, and Conservation. The proposed action petitions a change from Conservation District to Agricultural District.

The State Land Use District Boundary Amendment would allow Sanford Service Center to bring their business practices into land use conformance, enabling the expansion of mining and quarrying activities at Leilani Quarry into the long term. The proposed action would support the quarry's expansion from its current footprint of 30 acres to 73 acres. The continued and expanded operations at Leilani Quarry would then support the essential economy of Puna and East Hawai'i while remaining within land use conformance.

This is especially significant because Leilani Quarry is one of only a few quarries on Hawai'i Island — and within the state — where this type of valuable cinder resource can be extracted. This has been recognized by both the Governor through an emergency proclamation in 2018 during the eruptions, and subsequently by the Legislature, which passed an act directing the State to identify other locations in Hawai'i where this type of cinder resource can be mined. The services Sanford Service Center provides through Leilani Quarry are clearly essential to the horticultural and nursery industries, which are in part vital to the State of Hawai'i.

Now let's take a closer look at the petition area, outlined in yellow. This is the land that would be reclassified from Conservation to Agricultural under the proposed action. However, reclassification to Agricultural does not mean that mining and quarrying activities would occur across the entire yellow-outlined area.

The petition area is broken down further in the following figure. In blue is the license area — the 73 acres to which Sanford Service Center, in coordination with the property owner, would be permitted to expand mining and quarrying activities. In orange is the buffer area, approximately 21 acres. This is an intentional buffer delineated for various resource management objectives and conservation measures, ensuring that activities are buffered from adjacent parcels and sensitive areas. This is visible along the northern edge of the petition area, where the buffer area separates the license area from Leilani Estates.

The Draft EIS will address existing conditions, potential impacts, and mitigation measures across the following resource areas already identified for analysis:

Geology and geohazards will be analyzed, particularly given the geologically active nature of the petition area. Hydrology and water resources, as well as biological resources, will be analyzed to evaluate the extent to which current and expanded activities may impact water and biological resources. Air quality, noise, and hazardous substances — of which little to no significant impacts are anticipated — will be addressed. Impacts to the local and broader economy will be examined. Historic and cultural resources will be analyzed, including archaeological resources and resources related to cultural practices. Impacts to public facilities, infrastructure, and utilities will be evaluated, though these are expected to be minimal given the relatively rural location in Puna. Land use will also be analyzed, including how mining and quarrying activities may affect future land use within the petition area and how planned activities conform with applicable land use rules.

A number of technical studies will be used and referenced in the Draft EIS to support the evaluation of these resources, potential impacts, and mitigation.

Fortunately, three extensive biological surveys have been completed for the petition area between 2013 and 2024. Each survey involved field investigations to search for endangered, protected, and threatened flora and fauna, and subsequently proposed management and mitigation measures to protect vulnerable species within and near the petition area. The Draft EIS will rely heavily on all three biological surveys.

Additional technical studies were completed even before drafting of the EIS Preparation Notice began. These include a Cultural Impact Assessment completed by Orr and Hahn in 2015; an Archaeological Inventory Survey, which involved a field survey to identify archaeological sites; and an Archaeological Site Preservation Plan, which established management practices to ensure those archaeological resources are adequately preserved and protected. The Archaeological Site Preservation Plan has been reviewed and approved by the State Historic Preservation Division (SHPD). All information from these three technical studies will be incorporated into the Draft EIS.

EIS rules require that a proposed action be analyzed alongside a reasonable range of alternatives, for the purpose of evaluating whether the impacts of each alternative are more or less significant than the others.

Alternative 1 is the proposed action: the Land Use District Boundary Amendment from Conservation to Agricultural.

Alternative 2 is an amendment to change the Conservation District subzone classification. There are several subzones within the Conservation District; the subject parcel is currently in the Limited subzone, but it could be changed to the Resource subzone. Within the Resource subzone, Sanford Service Center could be permitted to continue mining and quarrying activities with a Conservation District Use Permit from the Board of Land and Natural Resources (BLNR). This alternative will be discussed in more detail in the EIS.

The Land Use District Boundary Amendment is the preferred alternative for a couple of reasons. First, it brings the parcel into consistency with surrounding lands, which are largely already designated Agricultural. Second, the County of Hawai'i currently zones the parcel itself as Agricultural, meaning the County already recognizes the land and its appropriate uses as agricultural in character.

Finally, as required by EIS rules, a No-Action Alternative must be analyzed. Under the no-action scenario, all designations remain unchanged and Leilani Quarry remains within the Conservation District Limited subzone. This alternative would eventually result in the discontinuation of operations at Leilani Quarry, as the quarry would be unable to expand and would eventually have to close.

The Draft EIS will also conduct a thorough review of applicable State and County policies and plans and how they relate to the proposed action and current operations at Leilani Quarry. This includes analysis of consistency with the Hawai'i State Land Use Law, the Hawai'i State Plan, the Hawai'i State Functional Plans, and the Hawai'i Coastal Zone Management Program. On the County side, a County of Hawai'i Special Permit will be required, and conformance with the County of Hawai'i General Plan will be evaluated.

We have now covered the bulk of the presentation and it is time to discuss how to submit comments.

Comments on the EISPN must be received by March 7, 2025 — please submit any comments as soon as possible. Comments may be mailed to the address on screen, or emailed to LeilaniQuarryProject@g70.design. The link to the EISPN is also displayed on screen — feel free to take a screenshot to save this information. Oral comments may also be provided tonight.

Scoping comments are submitted in compliance with HAR § 11-200.1 and are intended to give participants the opportunity to comment on the scope the Draft EIS will analyze. If anyone would like to leave a comment, please raise your hand or unmute and state your name and hometown, and we will take comments one at a time.

It appears we have no additional attendees wishing to comment this evening.

Thank you all for joining the scoping meeting and for participating in the environmental review process. Mahalo, and have a good evening.

END TRANSCRIPT