

State of Hawai`i
DEPARTMENT OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES
Division of Forestry and Wildlife
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

October 12, 2012

Chairperson and Members
Board of Land and Natural Resources
State of Hawai`i
Honolulu, Hawai`i

Board of Land and Natural Resources Members:

**SUBJECT: REQUEST FOR APPROVAL OF THE ‘ĀHIHI-KINA‘U NATURAL
 AREA RESERVE MANAGEMENT PLAN .**

BACKGROUND:

In 1970, the State Legislature created the Natural Area Reserves System (NARS), one of the first such in the United States, to preserve and protect representative samples of Hawaiian biological ecosystems and geological formations, in as unmodified a manner as possible. In 1973, ‘Āhihi-Kina‘u was designated as the first Natural Area Reserve (NAR), making it one of the most highly protected lands under state jurisdiction. By law, all resources within the Reserve are protected from harm or disturbance. The 2,045 acre Reserve is unique in that it contains an example of the most recent lava flow on the dry south flank of East Maui (1,238 acres) as well as a marine component (807 acres).

Sparsely vegetated, there are kipuka containing remnant coastal dry shrublands, pioneer plants and animals re-establishing themselves on the lava, native cave animals, anchialine pool and near-shore marine ecosystems, coastal and boulder beach communities, and extensive coral reef communities; all of which are important natural and cultural resources, along with numerous cultural and historic sites associated with active use of the area by Hawaiians.

At the time the NAR was established, it was remote, accessed only via a very rough unpaved road. Much of the surrounding area was planned for development, which helped to make the case for protecting as much of the area as possible. Visitor numbers and management challenges grew exponentially following paving of the road, with many drawn to the area by what guide books extolled as a “must see” destination.

Protection of the resources is of paramount, so the growing numbers of visitors to the area prompted a number of actions which culminated on August 1, 2008, when, with approval from the ‘Āhihi-Kina‘u / Keone‘ō‘io Advisory Group (AK/KAG), the Natural

Area Reserves System Commission (NARSC) and the Board of Land and Natural Resources (BLNR); staff restricted access to portions of the Reserve in order to conduct baseline surveys for geological, coastal, marine, anchialine, and cultural resources in an effort to monitor recovery and determine future use levels. Staff also began to collaborate with The Nature Conservancy of Hawai'i (TNCH) to complete the Management Plan originally drafted in 1992, expanding it into a long range management plan with broad and active community involvement. Ten meetings were held on Maui to gather expert input and suggestions. Although significant progress was made and a first draft was almost completed, more efforts needed to be taken to finish the task.

The BLNR in June of 2010 approved a second request to continue access restrictions, from August 1, 2010 to July 31, 2012, to allow time for completion of the Management Plan. A Draft Management Plan was circulated for public review and comment in the fall of 2010 and later approved by the Advisory Group in January of 2011. The NARSC requested revisions to the plan in March of 2011, particularly to identify priority actions as a subset of the entire Plan.

Then in April of 2011 all staff efforts required focus on addressing interests and concerns associated with the planning, organizing and implementing of extensive field surveys for Unexploded Ordinance (UXO) in the Reserve by the US Army Corp of Engineers (USACE); UXO in the Reserve is an issue which had been previously addressed but not completely resolved.

A portion of the Reserve was one of four bombing targets on Maui used by the 14th Naval District of the U.S. Military in early 1945 through 1946. It is classified as a Formerly Used Defense Site (FUDS) and subject of the Defense Environmental Restoration Program (DERP). In July of 1996 a DERP visual survey and preliminary assessment of the site was conducted that identified a six inch naval projectile, a mechanical time fuse, a .50 caliber projectile, projectile fragments, and impact craters. The resulting DERP Project Summary Sheet dated September 1996 proposed a "surface and shallow subsurface sweep and removal" noting that "Public Access is unimpeded" and determined an existing Hazard Severity of "Critical" and a Hazard Probability of "Probable". The next phase work on this Project was delayed and/or went unfunded for several years.

Between 2005 and 2007, prior to access restrictions, at least three pieces of high explosive ordinance were discovered by staff in the Reserve requiring the dispatch of Army Explosive Ordinance Disposal (EOD) personnel from O'ahu to safely dispose of those items. Two of those incidents required closing the nearby public road.

Partly due to the findings of UXO by staff combined with the fact the public access to the site remained unimpeded, the USACE conducted a Site Inspection in November 2007 "to determine whether the site warrants further munitions and explosives of concern or munitions constituents response action or no ... action." A Final Site Inspection Report dated June 2008 noted that after four days of inspection, where approximately 21.4 miles of walked qualitative reconnaissance was conducted, one .50 caliber round and two intact

155mm shrapnel projectiles were discovered and debris including “numerous fragments from .50 caliber bullets, artillery projectiles, lead shrapnel and mortar fins.” were observed. It concluded that “it is highly likely that more...exist on the surface and in the cracks and crevasses of the lava fields...” So with a high risk, probability and likelihood of more UXO in an area with unimpeded public access, the Reserve then was ranked at the top of the list for site project funding requests obtained in 2009 to continue the next phase of work, followed by recommendations.

In September of 2010 USACE began a series of Technical Project Planning (TPP) meetings on the Remedial Investigation/Feasibility Study (RI/FS) phase of the project and to discuss the technical approach and data gathering methodology. The project proposal involved more extensive surveys and sampling for UXO conducted by approximately 30 people on the ground and in the water following predetermined transect routes over a period starting in the summer of 2011. The TPP meetings included USACE, their contractors along with the State Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR) and Department of Health (DOH) personnel. Planning became somewhat problematic when discussing the potential impacts from extensive field activities in a highly protected area with endangered species and their habitats. Especially, when considering the fact that if UXO was discovered during surveys but, not safe to move; it would need to be blown in place (BIP) and the resulting need to “consult” with appropriate agencies such as DLNR, United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) on mitigating those potential impacts. To resolve concerns from USACE about the need to move sooner rather than later with implementing this project and others, the State acted to allow the projects to move forward in a timely manner by the issuance of a Governor’s proclamation exempting these projects state wide from State environmental review laws and procedures based on public safety. The USACE continued to work for the next year to address concerns and issues raised by all “stakeholders” including the State, USFWS and NOAA. Finally, a public informational meeting about the project was held by USACE on Maui in September 2011 with surveys commencing shortly thereafter on October 4, 2011 finishing just before Thanksgiving. Data collected from the surveys was to be then gathered, analyzed and presented to the stakeholders for discussion starting in February 2012, with a Decision Document to follow; however this process has been delayed due to unforeseen circumstances per USACE.

ANALYSIS:

The most accessible and well-used portions of the Reserve will remain the current focus of the staff-driven volunteer program to help visitors understand, appreciate, and respect the area. This open area was surveyed extensively in fall 2011, and determined to be safe for continued daily public use. Staff will also be looking at the closed portions of the Reserve to determine possible future levels of access by the general public, as well as incorporating future USACE recommendations on UXO into the Management Plan to further determine how much and what types of human use to allow and where in the Reserve.

The current closure period runs from August 1, 2012 through July 31, 2014. The AK/KAG, at its April 24, 2012 meeting, recommended closure for one additional year to complete the Management Plan, obtain the USACE recommendations and fill vacant staff positions. The NARSC, at its June 4, 2012 meeting, recommended closure for two years, to allow for completion of the Management Plan and USACE final recommendations. The BLNR approved closure for two years subject to completion of the Management Plan and USACE recommendations.

The recent hiring of a new Reserve Manager and Volunteer/Outreach Coordinator will allow more of a presence in the area to better implement the management plan that so many have worked so hard to bring before the Board of Land and Natural Resources for their approval and support.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Board of Land and Natural Resources, approves the 'Āhihi-Kina'u Natural Area Reserve Management Plan, to carry out actions as planned by staff and community members.

Respectfully Submitted,



Roger Imoto, Acting Administrator
Division of Forestry and Wildlife

APPROVED FOR SUBMITTAL:



WILLIAM J. AILA, JR., Chairperson
Board of land and Natural Resources

ATTACHMENTS:

Management Plan Development Process
Management Plan
Management Plan Overview
Implementation Plan

‘ĀHIHI-KĪNA‘U NATURAL AREA RESERVE Management Plan Development Process

In 2008 a diverse and representative community and government working group began the process of developing a draft management plan for ‘Ahihi-Kina‘u Natural Area Reserve. The plan they crafted aims to preserve and protect the Reserve’s unique natural and cultural heritage by addressing both new and long-standing issues well into the future.

The planning process was supported and guided by a unique partnership between DLNR’s Natural Area Reserve System, The Nature Conservancy of Hawaii, and the ‘Ahihi-Kina‘u NAR/Keone‘o‘io Advisory Group - a stakeholder group that provides guidance to DLNR regarding the management of the Reserve and Keone‘o‘io.

The 20-member working group worked together and consulted with experts in more than 15 meetings from 2008 to 2010 to establish the vision, priority resources, threats, goals, objectives and strategic actions for preserving ‘Ahihi-Kina‘u NAR.

The working group finalized a draft plan in December 2010 after considering and incorporating public comment. Comments on the draft plan were invited during the open comment period: October 20 - November 20, 2010. A public meeting was held on November 3, 2010, which provided the public with another opportunity to provide input and comments.

In January 2011, the working group presented the draft plan to the public and the ‘Ahihi-Kina‘u NAR/Keone‘o‘io Advisory Group. The Advisory Group recommended the plan be moved forward to the Natural Area Reserves Commission, who reviewed the draft management plan and implementation plan at their meetings on March 7, 2011 and June 4, 2012.

At the June 4, 2012 Meeting, the NARS Commission recommended the plan move forward for approval to the Board of Land and Natural Resources. Once the Board approves the draft management plan it will become final.

Management Plan Development Process

