

What's going on at Kawainui Marsh?

Restoration of the Kawainui-Hamakua Complex will serve both natural and cultural aims recognized by the public

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POSTED: 01:30 a.m. HST, June 25, 2014

LAST UPDATED: 01:58 a.m. HST, June 25, 2014



KAT WADE / SPECIAL TO THE STAR-ADVERTISER

This is the view of Kawainui Marsh from Na Pohaku Hauwahine Park along Kapaa Quarry Road. A state plan to restore the roughly 1,000 acres is centered on restoration, habitat enhancement and education.

The state Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR) welcomes continued input on the Kawainui-Hamakua Complex draft master plan.

This planning process, initiated in fall 2011, is to update the master plan for the approximately 1,000-acre Kawainui-Hamakua Complex in Kailua to serve as a guide for future decisions.

In order for the plan to reflect the mission of DLNR and the various needs of the immediate communities, the people of Hawaii, and the native plant and animal life, the planning process requires productive public input based on objective evaluation of accurate information. Reviewing the draft master plan and its appendices is the best way to gain a complete understanding of the purpose and need for the plan (see www.hhf.com/kawainui/index.html). The following are some highlights.

Kawainui-Hamakua is designated as a Wetland of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. It is a state resource for waterbird habitat and is of significant cultural importance to the Native Hawaiian community.

Unfortunately, this resource is not pristine. Challenges for the wetland include invasive plants that choked open water areas, non-native forest have overtaken large parts of the wetland, and increased use of the area has placed stress on the environment.

The plan is intended to help DLNR meet its objectives to support restoration and habitat enhancement of this resource, provide public access, create educational and stewardship opportunities, support Native Hawaiian cultural practices, and provide outdoor recreational opportunities. Much of the plan is centered on restoration, habitat enhancement, stewardship and education, which is accomplished in partnership with nonprofit organizations to assist DLNR's resource management efforts.

Most of the plan components are not new. They consist of elements from a prior 1994 plan. The City & County of Honolulu initiated plans in 2002-2003 for pedestrian paths and a park, DLNR restoration plans, reforestation efforts at Na Pohaku o Hauwahine, and cultural landscape management at Ulupo Heiau State Historical Park.



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A critical piece of the plan provides a permanent presence for Native Hawaii cultural practices and stewardship of the aina at Kawainui. Some areas designated for Hawaiian cultural use by nonprofit organizations are new to the current plan, based on community input.

In addition, there are three parking locations that would be open to the public: 1) at an educational center; 2) a park site across Kalaheo High School; and 3) an area across from Le Jardin Academy. Other parking areas would have restricted access.

The draft plan reflects broad public input received during the planning process over the past 2½ years. This included three DLNR public meetings, meetings with community organizations, participation in a non-DLNR initiated public meeting, and other activities to distribute information and solicit input. Like any community, Kailua is diverse. During our public outreach process, we received comments and recommendations from the Kailua Neighborhood Board, Hawaiian civic clubs, educational groups, and many others.

DLNR is sensitive to concerns about tourism and too many visitors. The purpose of this plan is not to increase unmanaged use of the area. The area is already being used by locals and visitors. The plan will better manage these uses. It will ensure that people explore and learn about their natural resources firsthand in a way that is safe and sustainable.

The community planning process is, and will continue to be, open and transparent. There will be more opportunities for thoughtful input through most of 2015; primarily through the environmental review process.

Visit the project website (stated above) to keep up with the planning process.