



The Puako Marine Field Station

Kalakaua Marine Education Center at UH Hilo would like to develop an undergraduate marine field station at Puako. The reefs off Puako are among the best developed and most diverse in all Hawaii, making the site one of the most important locations in the world for coral reef studies. Significant research has been conducted in the area by undergraduate, graduate students, and faculty from the UH Hilo Marine Science Department and Marine Options Program. This research work has been difficult to carry out because field bases have to be established far away from the area, either in Kailua-Kona or Hilo.

To facilitate marine education and research activities in West Hawai'i, UH Hilo sought to acquire state property in the Puako area over a decade ago. In 1990, the Hawai'i Board of Land and Natural Resources issued the University a 65-year lease for five acres of a 20-acre parcel northeast of the Puako boat ramp. In 1992, the State Legislature passed a resolution encouraging the Department of Land and Natural Resources to lease the remaining 15 acres to the University. Funds for planning the facility were allocated by the State legislature the next year, but were never released due to a downturn in the State economy. The 65-year lease on 5 acres was renewed by DLNR in April 2004, but plans must be submitted no later than April 2008 or the lease will be rescinded. Environmental and archeological studies have already been completed for the site, but no further action has been taken pending master plan development and capital improvement of the site.

We can not afford to wait any longer to make this field laboratory a reality. Reefs are in peril around the world, and Puako has the potential of being the best

hands-on living laboratory to promote understanding and conservation of one of Earth's most precious resources. The site would provide the perfect field station for the study of water quality and coral reef conservation and management. With low impact on the area, the facility would serve to spotlight the traditional Hawaiian relationship with the sea that the Puako community so actively protects.

It is in this spirit that the University wishes to develop a premier field lab to train undergraduate students, current and future teachers, and native Hawaiians in marine education. The Puako Marine Field Station would be one of the few labs in the country dedicated to ocean research activities in which undergraduates are the primary participants. With the academic support of UH Hilo, whose primary mission is to provide excellent undergraduate liberal arts and professional programs, the laboratory would provide a wide range of educational and research activities available nowhere else in the UH system.

The laboratory, managed by UH Hilo's Kalakaua Marine Education Center, would serve statewide marine education and research training needs, including those of the UH Center at West Hawai'i. It would also serve as a focal point in monitoring the marine environment along the still pristine North Kohala coast. Further, the establishment of the facility would protect the site from development that may not suit the Puako community.

We at the Kalakaua Marine Education Center would like to take this opportunity to ask for assistance and encourage discussion and input from the community on this proposal.

