



Kauai's Poipu beach is eroding 1 foot per year

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(AP) — LIHUE, Hawaii - Poipu Beach, a favorite of both tourists and endangered Hawaiian monk seals, is eroding at a rate of about one foot a year because of storms and what a coastal geologist calls "chronic erosion."

The loss of sand at the shore is so dramatic that "Dr. Beach"-a Florida professor who named Poipu the nation's top beach in 2001-might not even recognize the place, said Jody Kono Kjeldsen, the executive director of the Poipu Beach Resort Association.

"In all honesty, Poipu Beach isn't what it used to be," Kjeldsen told the Kauai County Council last week.

Jim O'Connell, a coastal geologist with the University of Hawaii Sea Grant Program, said a shoreline change project shows the beach park has lost about a foot a year since 1927.

The erosion has created dangerous swimming and snorkeling conditions for both residents and visitors, he said.

That's because a stretch of sand, known as a "spit" or "tombolo," which used to separate the calm side of Poipu Beach Park from what is commonly called the Waiohai side, has been washed away.

Without that tombolo, the east-to-west current flowing through Poipu Beach Park has nothing to slow it down.

O'Connell said the current has swept many visitors toward the Sheraton Kauai Resort beach forcing Poipu Beach Park lifeguards to respond.

Kjeldsen said she receives letters from return visitors saying they are seeking other beaches and other islands to visit because of the deteriorating conditions.

"Poipu Beach Park is critical to our industry," she added.

The area is home to several large hotels, including a Sheraton and a Hyatt, as well as condominium resorts and rental cottages.

A Hawaiian monk seal gave birth to a pup at the beach park in 2001. Another pup was born on the beach in front of nearby Kiahuna Plantation Resort in 2005.

Kjeldsen said the resort association is willing to pay for part of a beach replenishment project that stalled three years ago.

One of the goals of the project would be to reduce the volume and strength of the east-to-west current, said O'Connell, who advises Kauai County on coastal matters.

The first phase of the three-phase plan would involve moving 500 cubic yards of sand to the beach. The sand is currently stored at the Kekaha Landfill.

This could be completed quickly because only one permit, from the state Department of Land and Natural Resources, would be required.

The second phase would move 6,000 cubic yards of sand from Kekaha to Poipu. This would require permits from the state Department of Health and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. It also would likely need an environmental assessment, O'Connell said.

The third phase would involve searching for a long-term source of suitable beach sand, likely including the exploration of offshore, deep-water areas.

O'Connell said the alternatives would be to do nothing, armor the beach with a seawall, or move the existing beach inland.

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