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State, UH create plan to protect beaches and dunes of Kailua Bay

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One of the best beaches in the nation will soon have a management plan that could serve as a template to protect and preserve shorelines throughout Hawai'i.

The University of Hawai'i Sea Grant program and the state Department of Land and Natural Resources have joined efforts to create a Beach and Dune Management Plan for beaches within Kailua Bay. The Board of Land and Natural Resources recently granted \$50,000 to Sea Grant to fund the project.

Chosen for its dune system that has withstood the onslaught of development, Kailua Beach is one of the few in the state that is growing, accreting sand rather than losing it, said Sam Lemmo, administrator for the Coastal Lands Division at the DLNR.

It was also chosen because of various issues that arise there, including encroachments, building setbacks and conflicts among users, Lemmo said.

"The beaches across the state of Hawai'i, in many cases, are underprotected," Lemmo said.

Beaches have conservation status, and that helps, but more can be done such as the state does with forest reserves that have a higher level of protections, he said.

The hope is to raise the awareness of the public so it will respect the beaches, attract the interest of organizations that can direct their resources and energy to protect beaches and influence development that will not overpower the shoreline, Lemmo said.

"It's a beach that has a lot of value for a lot of people on the island," he said. "It's something we can put resources into, and we believe that it will have a long-term payoff."

Waves eating shore

Kailua residents and regular beach users think the plan is a good idea, especially in light of the fact that the beach near the boat ramp has been eroding at an alarming rate for more than six months.

Waves are eating away at the shore, creating 10-foot to 15-foot vertical drops and exposing tree roots along the bank at Kailua Beach Park.

During the Kamehameha Day canoe races at the park, a child fell through the roots of one of the trees, leading the city to remove it the following week, said Eddie Frias, who has lived across the street from the park all of his life.

Frias, 64, said he has his ideas about what the management plan should say: Cut down the dunes and put the sand back into the ocean.

"The row of trees along the beach gotta come out," he said. "I think it's a safety hazard."

Charlie Kalama, 60, agreed and said when he was young, sand would build up, but the city would remove it.

"Every year they would push this back in the ocean," said Kalama, whose family had a home there. "When they started building seawalls in Lanikai, the sand couldn't recycle. Now all the sand ... is stuck in the middle of the bay."

13 objectives

The plan has 13 objectives, including to enhance and protect the healthy sand-sharing system of Kailua Bay before it is negatively affected by poor development practice, identify the boundary between private and public property, educate the public on appropriate beach development practices, expand understanding of potential impacts of climate change in Kailua and plan future coastal development in Kailua in conformance with community priorities.

Dolan Eversole, principal investigator for the project, said the Kailua plan could be the first of several beach management plans that could be used as a guideline to care for other shorelines that have similar geology.

The state had wanted to create one big master plan for all of Hawai'i, but that proved to be a monumental task, said Eversole, who works for Sea Grant.

"Instead, we've toned it down or downscaled it to a handful of pilot projects that we might learn from," he said, adding that the goal is to implement the plan, not just to create one.

Growth to the north

Charles "Chip" Fletcher, a University of Hawai'i professor who is conducting a study of the historical shoreline changes of every beach on O'ahu, called the plan an important start that should involve city, state and federal agencies.

Fletcher's study has shown that many of the beaches at the north end of Kailua Bay

are growing. But the southern end, at Kailua Beach Park, is eroding. The data reveal that the erosion is accelerating, the growth is slowing and the erosion is moving north, he said.

"We might be transitioning to a beach that is not as robust in the future," Fletcher said. "So here again is a compelling reason for us to begin to manage the shoreline development more."
