



# News Release

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## Reef Watch Waikīkī Launched

### **Kama'aina and visitors unite to protect Waikīkī's unique natural resources**

The University of Hawai'i Sea Grant College Program (UH Sea Grant) has received a \$44,997 grant from the Hawaii Tourism Authority's Natural Resource Program to launch Reef Watch Waikīkī, a community-based education and coastal monitoring program. The program will train community volunteers to share their knowledge of Waikīkī's natural history with visitors and residents they interact with and gather valuable data regarding the use and condition of nearshore resources.

Leading the project is Jennifer Barrett, UH Sea Grant's Waikīkī Coastal Coordinator.

"The short-term goal is to promote and support community stewardship of Māmala Bay," explained Barrett. "Reef Watch Waikīkī will provide a means for the community to play a role in ensuring proper management of marine resources in Waikīkī."

Currently, there is no unified effort to monitor, protect, or restore the coastal and marine resources of Waikīkī, yet threats abound. Improving the health and vitality of these natural resources is integral to the continued economic contributions of Hawai'i's flagship visitor destination as well as opportunities for surfing, paddling, fishing and other ocean-based activities that contribute to the overall quality of life for O'ahu residents.

"We recognize that achieving these goals will require a long-term commitment and collaboration with area businesses and kama'aina who live, work and play in Waikīkī," noted Barrett, "which is why we're extremely pleased to be partnering with the Waikīkī Improvement Association in this effort."

Rick Egged, president of the Waikīkī Improvement Association, explained, "Extensive resources have been directed towards understanding the economic contribution of Waikīkī, yet far fewer have been directed to understanding and safeguarding the unique natural resources that lure both residents and visitors to the area. Healthy beaches and reefs are critical to a sustainable visitor industry and we're excited to be a partner in this project due its potential ecological, social and economic benefits for the Waikīkī community."

Reef Watch Waikīkī will also incorporate lessons learned from two other UH Sea Grant projects, the Hanauma Bay Education Program, which is approaching its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and Kahalu'u Bay's ReefTeach program which was launched six years ago by Sara Peck, UH Sea Grant extension agent based in Kona. Both programs operate on the premise that education empowers communities to care for the natural environment.

For more information about the UH Sea Grant College Program, visit <http://www.soest.hawaii.edu/SEAGRANT> or contact Cindy Knapman at (808) 956-7410.

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*The University of Hawai'i Sea Grant College Program supports an innovative program of research, education and extension services directed to the improved understanding and stewardship of coastal and marine resources of the state, region and nation. Science serving Hawai'i and the Pacific for 40 years.*