

Prioritizing Public Recreational Areas

Living in Hawaii is a blessing and privilege. We have a strong sense of community, responsibility, and Aloha that have enabled Hawaii thrive in many different ways. A major part of many residents' lives is experiencing the many different ecosystems available in Hawaii, and many enjoy this by doing activities such as running, biking, hiking, swimming and so on. An avid biker myself, I have noticed that although there are opportunities for safe and recreational use of state land, I feel like there could be greater improvements to these areas.

Firstly, an important consideration when proposing a solution to this problem is Hawaii's tourism industry. Hawaii's economy is driven by various sectors including agriculture, construction, scientific research, and quite significantly tourism. Tourists arrive in Hawaii targeting beaches, waterfalls, rainforests, volcanoes, and other geological features that the islands are known for. Around 10.5 million tourists visited Hawaii in 2019, marking an increase of 5.4% from the previous year (Hawaii Tourism Authority). Subsequently, a greater influx of people arriving means greater strain on pre-existing parks and trails that are frequented by tourists and residents alike. Inevitably, a greater amount of people arriving in Hawaii means overcrowding and increased damage to ecosystems in the way of littering, introduction of invasive flora and fauna, and so on.

As lesser-frequented areas are experiencing higher levels of human activity, this leaves local residents with many of their recreational areas busy and disturbed. Physical activity is especially important for personal wellbeing and parks like Liliuokalani Park and Gardens, Kalopa State Recreational Area are utilized by many of the community, while areas such as Wailoa River State Park and Reed's Bay are rarely considered by tourists and residents alike. There are so many areas of Hawaii that could additionally be better improved to adapt to greater amounts of tourists, as well as to better serve the local community. What I'm proposing does not include disregarding the efforts of conservationists that have worked tirelessly to ensure that Hawaii remain as untouched as possible by humans in order to preserve endemic species, habitats, and wildlife. I suggest the better management of pre-existing areas public-access areas that could simply be improved by providing things like basic facilities and the action of the state and county to safely and responsibly maintain and enforce rules in these areas to prevent things like overcrowding and environmental damage.

I do acknowledge that this is a tricky line to toe. However, the benefits of improving facilities and trail systems all over Hawaii to increase public access are numerous. Younger children would have more opportunities to safely engage in things like biking and hiking, which in turn strengthens familial and community ties and relations. The outdoors also fosters curiosity for learning more about Hawaii and why it's so special, encouraging children to remain involved and engaged with science curriculum in school. And lastly, my solution also aligns with Clarence T.C. Ching's dream of improving Hawaii and uplifting it to the best version of itself. While this dream of having better managed land for bikers, hikers, hikers, walkers, or whatever you enjoy doing might seem small or insignificant, it can impact so many people, young and old, and make Hawaii a better place for generations to come.

Hawaii Tourism Authority. *Hawai'i Visitor Statistics Released for 2019.*

<https://www.hawaiitourismauthority.org/news/news-releases/2020/hawai-i-visitor-statistics-released-for-2019/> Accessed 10/23/20. Published 1/29/20.