



## News Release

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### **Local Kayak Businesses Help in The Conservation of Offshore Islets**

Residents and tourists alike relish the opportunity to spend time in Hawaii's clear, blue waters. Many of these same people use personal watercraft – rented or owned – to visit the States' many offshore islets. It is this very zeal to experience our natural marine and offshore islet resources that may result in us "loving them to death".

Public use both recreational and commercial has always raised concerns about the natural resources in the area, but recently public concern has heightened to the possible impacts, especially from commercial kayak operators in Kailua.

In September 2002, the Offshore Islet Restoration Committee (OIRC) was formed by a small group of dedicated professionals who recognized the need to protect and restore Hawaii's offshore islets. In 2005, representatives from Kailua Sailboards and Kayaks and Mokulua Kayak Guides became active members of the OIRC recognizing the importance of their roles in conserving the very resource they benefit from.

"We have always supported conservation of the area's resources and realize that the private sector needs to step up and take a more proactive approach to ensure that future generations can also enjoy the benefits provided by Hawaii's beautiful natural resources," said Steve Haumschild, manager of Kailua Sailboards and Kayaks.

In 2005, the OIRC developed a kayak card with the goal of informing kayak renters in the Kailua area of some of the native plant and animal species they may encounter on the adjacent offshore islets, the proper visitor etiquette needed to lessen their impact to the natural resource, and general information about the OIRC and some of their restoration efforts.

The card - laminated and designed to attach to each kayak - was distributed to all the kayak rental companies in Kailua who welcomed the outreach product and agreed to use it in their daily operations and evaluate its effectiveness.

Based on feedback provided by Steve Haumschild and Scott Burch, owner of Mokulua Kayak Guides a new, revised version of the card is being designed by Steve and his coworkers at Kailua Sailboards and Kayaks. Kailua Sailboards and Kayaks has also agreed to fund productions costs of the new kayak card. OIRC representatives will distribute the card to any and all interested businesses.

"Guided interpretive tours can be a valuable conduit for information exchange between the public and the scientific community. Venues like the Discovery channel make an attempt at filling that niche, but there is nothing as valuable as personal experience," said Scott Burch. "We recognize the need for sustainable use and management of the marine and offshore islet resources. As small business owners and/or operators it is our civic responsibility to contribute to the unified and effective management of Hawaii's natural treasures."

True to his word, Scott has volunteered his time and expertise in the development of an OIRC educational poster. The poster will be designed to reach a larger, more diverse audience and inform resource users of regulations and proper etiquette while visiting offshore islets.

In addition, Mokulua Kayak Guides contributes \$5 per person to The Wildlife Society for conservation efforts, specifically on offshore islets. This money is matched 2 to 3-fold by grants. That equates to \$15-20 per person to help fund activities such as control of invasive species and planting native vegetation. Scott also sends out a mailer each year to residents near the Mokulua Islands informing them of the potential negative impacts their outdoor lights have on young seabirds.

Scott has found that his clients do not mind paying the extra \$5 dollars, especially if it goes directly to conservation. Visiting tourist Cynthia Douglas from Paso Robles, California said “To do something that actually helps the area your are visiting as opposed to just visiting some place and trampling all over it really makes a difference”. Scott and his staff have also assisted the Hawaii DLNR Division of Forestry and Wildlife with seabird counts on some offshore islets – even involving enthusiastic clients in the surveys.

Hawaii’s offshore islets are fragile biological gems scattered among the azure background of the Pacific Ocean. These islets provide relatively untouched pristine habitats where coastal species – some of which are no longer present on the main islands -find refuge from the influences of our modern world. Their relative isolation from the main Hawaiian Islands and inaccessibility contribute to their biological integrity and success.

Future cooperative efforts with the OIRC and commercial recreation companies will include on-site orientation/outreach to any and all interested stakeholders, more interpretive signs located at boat ramps, beach accesses, and major beach parks.

“The OIRC and its members hope to show residents and tourists of Hawaii that diverse interest groups can effectively unite and work towards the common goal of restoring, protecting and conserving Hawaii’s offshore islets and adjacent waters,” said Chris Swenson, OIRC chairman. “Through a collective and proactive approach we can ensure that our love for the resource does not lead to its demise.”

The OIRC welcomes participation from any and all interested parties. Interested individuals, groups, and companies can contact Jaap Eijzenga at 808/973-9788 or e-mail at [jaap.eijzenga@hawaii.edu](mailto:jaap.eijzenga@hawaii.edu)

The OIRC is comprised of representatives from the Hawaii Department of Land and Natural Resources’ Divisions of Forestry and Wildlife and Aquatic Resources, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bishop Museum, the Nature Conservancy, the U.S. Coast Guard, the U.S. Geological Survey’s Biological Resources Division, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, NOAA Fisheries, Pelea Polynesia, the National Tropical Botanical Garden, the University of Hawaii, Kailua Sailboards and Kayaks Inc, and Mokulua Kayak Guides. The OIRC’s goal is to insure that Hawaii’s offshore islets are free of harmful alien species and are supporting healthy, native seabird, plant, insect and marine communities.

**Editors Note:** Images of OIRC outreach products and local kayak cooperators available upon request.