

PONC Commission
Hawai‘i County Planning Department
25 Aupuni Street, Hilo, HI 96720

April 24, 2025

Subject: Letter of Support for the Public Acquisition and Consolidation of Kumukahi Properties, Ahupua‘a of Kula, Puna District

Aloha PONC Commissioners:

On behalf of the Puna Community Development Commission (PCDC), we write in strong support of the proposed public acquisition and consolidation of 11 parcels—encompassing approximately 2,000 acres—located in the ahupua‘a of Kula at Kumukahi, in the Puna District. This effort is vital to the long-term protection of one of Hawai‘i’s most culturally, ecologically, and historically significant wahi pana and aligns closely with the goals of the Puna Community Development Plan (CDP).

We are pleased to note in the application, that all landowners of the 11 parcels have been consulted and have provided letters of support, indicating their willingness to sell their properties for the purpose of conservation and cultural preservation through the PONC process. This rare alignment of Government, non-profit and community with landowner cooperation, presents a unique opportunity for the County to take decisive and impactful action. Two non-profits Ho‘oulu Lāhui, a well-established 30 year non-profit, founded on the protection and education of our wahi pana and the Kuamo‘o Legacy Foundation have committed to taking the lead in the preservation and management of the area.

Cultural and Historical Preservation

Kumukahi is a wahi pana of immense cultural and spiritual significance. Traditionally recognized as the first place the sun touches Hawai‘i each day and as a sacred leina (spiritual transition point), it is closely tied to the arrival of Pele and serves as a wahi ilina (burial site) for generations of kūpuna. The Puna CDP prioritizes the protection of such sites:

2.1.1 Goals

- a. Structures and cultural sites that are significant to Puna’s history and cultural traditions are preserved.

The acquisition will enable implementation of a Burial Treatment Plan, ensuring the respectful care of iwi kūpuna, and provide permanent access for lineal and cultural descendants to maintain ceremonial and traditional practices.

Environmental Protection and Stewardship

The area supports endangered and native species such as the Hawaiian petrel ('Ua'u), Hawaiian hoary bat ('Ōpe'ape'a), and native coastal plants and trees. The parcels' consolidation supports:

2.1.1 Goals

- e. The native forests of Puna are revered as part of the native culture and are provided with permanent protection from degradation and loss.

A unified approach will allow for comprehensive ecological restoration, invasive species management, and the protection of fragile habitats.

Community Access, Education, and Managed Use

This initiative opens opportunities for community-based stewardship, including educational programming, interpretive trails, and managed visitor access that honors the cultural and natural significance of the area.

2.1.1 Goals

- d. Awareness and appreciation of the host culture is expanded.

Preservation of Coastal Areas and Public Safety

The project ensures that access to this delicate coastal region is carefully managed to prevent environmental degradation and safeguard public safety.

Conclusion

The Puna Community Development Commission fully supports this acquisition and consolidation initiative as it embodies the CDP's core values: community-based resource management, cultural integrity, ecological protection, and sustainable land use. The support of all the identified collaborators reflects a shared vision for stewardship and preservation.

We urge the County to move forward with this acquisition and honor this opportunity to protect Kumukahi for current and future generations. A list of the 11 parcels is included as an attachment to this letter.

Mahalo for your thoughtful consideration.

Respectfully,

Puna Community Development Plan Action Committee