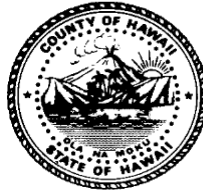


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County of Hawai'i

PUNA COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PLAN ACTION COMMITTEE

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February --, 2026

Chair Deborah Chang
and Members of the Public Access, Open Space, and
Natural Resources Preservation Commission (PONC)
County of Hawai'i
25 Aupuni Street, Suite 1101
Hilo, Hawai'i 96720

**SUBJECT: Puna Community Development Plan Action Committee Letter –
Support for Cape Kumukahi on PONC's Prioritized List**

Aloha Chair Chang and Members of PONC:

The Puna Community Development Plan (CDP) Action Committee writes to express its strong support for the County's proposed public acquisition and consolidation of the Cape Kumukahi parcels – 11 parcels totaling approximately 2,000 acres in the ahupua'a of Kula, Puna District – currently listed on the Hawai'i County Prioritized List for the Public Access, Open Space, and Natural Resources Preservation Fund.

This project represents a vital and timely opportunity to protect one of Hawai'i's most culturally, ecologically, and historically significant wahi pana through conservation, respectful cultural stewardship, and careful public management – fully consistent with the vision and priorities of the Puna CDP.

We are especially encouraged that the application reflects meaningful landowner engagement: all 11 landowners have been consulted and have provided letters of support indicating willingness to sell for conservation and cultural preservation through the PONC process. This alignment – landowners, community, nonprofit partners, and County purpose – creates a uniquely workable path forward that merits decisive action.

We also acknowledge and appreciate the commitment of community-based nonprofit partners who are prepared to help steward this place in perpetuity. Ho‘oūlu Lāhui, a well-established nonprofit with over 30 years of service centered on protecting and educating about wahi pana, and the Kuamo‘o Legacy Foundation have committed to take leading roles in preservation planning and long-term management in collaboration with the County and community.

Cultural and Historical Preservation

Kumukahi is a wahi pana of profound cultural and spiritual importance. Widely recognized as the easternmost point where the sun first touches Hawai‘i each day, it is associated with sacred traditions, including leina (a spiritual transition point). Kumukahi is also closely tied to the arrival of Pele and serves as a wahi ilina (burial site) for generations of kūpuna. These parcels hold deep significance for lineal and cultural descendants who continue to maintain longstanding ceremonial and traditional practices connected to this landscape.

Acquisition and consolidation would allow for coordinated implementation of a Burial Treatment Plan and other cultural management measures to ensure the respectful care of iwi kūpuna and to preserve appropriate access for descendants and practitioners.

This directly supports the Puna CDP goal to ensure:

“Structures and cultural sites that are significant to Puna’s history and cultural traditions are preserved.” (Puna CDP Goal 2.1.1)

Environmental Protection and Stewardship

The Kumukahi landscape includes native coastal ecosystems and habitat supporting endangered and native species, including the Hawaiian petrel (‘Ua‘u), Hawaiian hoary bat (‘Ōpe‘ape‘a), and native coastal plants and trees. Consolidating the parcels enables a comprehensive stewardship approach – ecosystem restoration, invasive species control, protection of sensitive habitats, and coordinated monitoring – rather than fragmented, parcel-by-parcel management.

This aligns with the Puna CDP goal to ensure:

“The native forests of Puna are revered as part of the native culture and are provided with permanent protection from degradation and loss.” (Puna CDP Goal 2.1.1)

Community Access, Education, and Managed Use

With appropriate planning, this acquisition can support community-based stewardship, place-based education, and carefully managed public access that honors cultural protocol and ecological limits. The project creates opportunities for interpretive and educational programming, cultural learning, and low-impact trails or guided access where appropriate – centered on mālama ‘āina and respectful visitation.

This supports the Puna CDP goal to:

“Expand awareness and appreciation of the host culture.” (Puna CDP Goal 2.1.1)

Coastal Protection and Public Safety

Cape Kumukahi is a fragile coastal environment. County acquisition and unified management will help prevent unmanaged impacts such as erosion, habitat degradation, illegal dumping, off-trail damage, and unsafe use in hazardous coastal areas. A coordinated management plan can balance cultural access and public benefit with resource protection and public safety, while preventing the incremental harms that often occur when lands remain fragmented or unmanaged.

In conclusion, the Puna CDP Action Committee strongly supports this acquisition and consolidation initiative as an investment in the long-term protection of Kumukahi for present and future generations. It advances the County’s public purposes of cultural integrity, ecological protection, community stewardship, and sustainable land management – supported by a coalition of willing landowners and committed nonprofit partners.

We respectfully urge the Commission to continue advancing this project through the PONC process and to support County action to secure these lands for permanent protection.

Mahalo for your thoughtful consideration.

Sincerely,

Melissa Leilani DeMello, Chair
Puna Community Development Plan Action Committee

JH

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