

**Testimony of Suzanne D. Case
Director
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before
The Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands
of the
House Committee on Natural Resources
on H.R. 1908
117th Congress, 1st Session**

June 15, 2021

Aloha Chairman Grijalva, Chairman Neguse, Ranking Member Westerman, Ranking Member Fulcher, and members of the subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of H.R. 1908, a bill to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a study of lands that could be included in a new Ka'ena Point National Heritage Area in Hawai'i.

My name is Suzanne Case, and I am Director of the Hawai'i State Department of Land and Natural Resources. I am testifying today on behalf of Governor David Ige and the Department of Land and Natural Resources supporting enactment of H.R. 1908. We believe the proposed study will provide valuable information and insight into natural and cultural resources management on the island of O'ahu, and could lead to federal and state collaboration in further protecting this unique and precious coastline for the future enjoyment of Hawaiians and the Nation. It can also serve to educate the public about National Heritage Areas and how they can contribute to the State's conservation objectives.

I want to acknowledge and thank Congressman Ed Case and Congressman Kai Kahele for their leadership and foresight in introducing this Ka'ena Point National Heritage Area legislation, and the South Kona National Heritage Area bill to study lands for potential inclusion on the equally unique and precious coastline from Ka Lae, South Point, to Miloli'i on the island of Hawai'i.

There are 55 National Heritage Areas across our nation, but none in Hawai'i. These National Heritage Areas reflect nationally important landscapes of our historic, cultural, and natural resources and the people and communities that enjoy them and depend on them. Hawai'i offers an opportunity to expand the scope of the National Heritage Area System to include unique areas of the tropical Pacific. The studies provided by enactment of H.R. 1908 and H.R. 1925 would identify the conservation possibilities and benefits that a National Heritage Area in Hawai'i would afford.

Ka'ena Point – in Hawaiian, “the heat” -- lies on the western tip of the island of O'ahu, by far our most populous island, facing the setting sun. The State of Hawai'i designated this area as a Natural Area Reserve in 1983, and the adjacent lands on both sides as a State Park in 1986.

Ka'ena is a coast of black lava and one of the last intact coastal sand dune ecosystems in the main Hawaiian Islands. For decades unauthorized vehicle use and unmanaged invasive species

wore this down to an unrecognizable wasteland devoid of native plants and wildlife. Intensive management and community collaboration over the past twenty years under a broadly vetted stewardship plan (<https://dlnr.hawaii.gov/ecosystems/nars/oahu/kaena/stewardship-area/>), including a predator-proof fence and weed control, has brought Ka'ena Point back to life.

Let me give you a feel for this rich heritage.

By ancient Hawaiian custom, when a person dies, his or her soul travels down the mountain ridge to the westernmost tip of the island, to the *leina a ka 'uhane*, the leaping place of the soul, and is thrust off into pō, the night, the warm darkness. Ka'ena Point hosts a famous *leina*, a large limestone rock outcropping facing the dark sea and white foamy waves.

These are storied places. Those tending the stone temple Mokaena heiau on the cliff high above at Pu 'u Pueo watched for war canoes to the west. A large sea cave, Kāneana, was the legendary home of Nanaue the shark man.

Low-crawling endemic Hawaiian plants hold the sand above the high wash of the waves – naupaka, pā'ū o Hi'iaka, and the tiny, paper-thin 'ilima flower of royalty.

Fishers, solitary or with friends or family, set their poles and camp chairs on the shore, and sit in the quiet. Hikers, swimmers, divers, and paddlers immerse themselves at *ka 'ae kai*, the water's edge.

Native, endangered Hawaiian Monk seals, *'ilioholoikauaua*, “dog that glides through the rolling waves”, haul out onto pockets of sand in coves, or on the black lava, to rest or nurse pups. Humpback whales and pods of Pacific bottlenose dolphins swim by offshore.

Protected from predators – dogs, cats, rats, mongoose, ants, off-road vehicles – the Laysan albatross have slowly returned – the count this year is several hundred albatross, with 81 nests and 48 fuzzy-headed chicks, the parents alternately leaving to soar above the ocean for days as far as Alaska, to bring back squid to feed the young one until it too can spread its wings and catch the uplift. Wedge-tailed shearwaters, completely gone as recently as the early 1990s, once again nest in burrows by the thousands (over 5,000), and red-footed and brown boobies and brown noddies fly by offshore. Ka'ena provides a story of hope for the restoration of Hawaii's native lands and waters.

Tracks of the old sugar cane haul train from a century ago remind us of Hawaii's historic pineapple and sugar plantations, which recruited immigrant workers from Japan, China, the Philippines, Korea, and Portugal, and African Americans, and permanently changed the face of Hawai'i. During World War II the railroad's infrastructure was almost entirely worn out by heavy use to transport material and troops. As traffic began receding following the war, a 55-foot tsunami struck the north shore of Oahu on April 1, 1946; the railroad was all but forced to shut

down with the heavy damages inflicted on the property and its customers. The railroad is now a remnant that leave ruts in red dirt, turning to mud pools in occasional cooling rains.

The South Point coast on Hawaii island is similarly rich in natural and cultural heritage. It hosts the extensive Manukā State Natural Area Reserve, established in 1983 and the largest natural area reserve in the state, protecting 25,550 acres from mountain to sea, and the State South Kona Wilderness area, established in 2011 to preserve the visual, cultural, biological and historical resources from Honomalino to Manukā, including ancient homesites, a holua slide, a heiau, and burial caves.

A coast of vast open spaces still, enjoyed by fishers, swimmers and explorers, one can find critical nesting sites for endangered hawksbill turtles and Hawaiian green sea turtles, Hawaiian monk seal haul outs, dolphin resting bays, and much reef life. The smooth stone path laid carefully across sharp crusted a‘a lava is the ancient coastal highway, passing ancient walls and fishing shrines

We work with many community groups, who have been working to protect and steward these areas for many years: ‘Aha Moku Advisory Council, Hawaii Marine Animal Response, Nā Kama Kai, Mālama Makua, Protectors of Paradise, Pa‘a Pono Miloli‘i, Pacific Rim Conservation, fishers, and others. These groups have participated in stewardship planning in the past, and should be included in community outreach in the National Heritage Area studies.

These good people, Native Hawaiian lineal descendants of ancestors from these areas, and other *kama‘āina*, people of the land, and newcomers, pull weeds in the hot sun; pick up salt-worn plastic bottlecaps and lighters and nets that floated from thousands of miles away; monitor grids and count chicks and burrows; fiercely guard hidden ancient burials, tend cultural sites, and proudly practice cultural traditions. They report dolphin chasers, illegal lay net and aquarium fishers, and unpermitted, disrespectful, disruptive, social-media-enticed parties to State conservation enforcement officers. Volunteers and staff watch over the endangered monk seals and turtles and albatross, collectively coaxing them back from the brink.

This is our precious heritage, that we inherit from those who came before, we preserve and enjoy now, and pass down to those who come next.

We look forward to working with the federal government together with local communities in this study.