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## Na Pali Coast Trail has devoted following

by Nathan Eagle - THE GARDEN ISLAND

As appropriated improvement money sits pending Hawai'i Gov. Linda Lingle's release, an anonymous volunteer has started tackling needed work on the most perilous stretch of world-renowned Na Pali Coast Trail on Kaua'i's North Shore.

"Last year, I was approached by several members of the community expressing concern for safety on the trail," said state Sen. Gary Hooser, D-Kaua'i. "I made it a priority to get some funding to begin the work."

In the Legislature's 2007 budget, approved June 27, lawmakers allocated \$1.2 million for the Kaua'i Planning and Action Alliance to restore and reconstruct hiking routes through Na Pali Coast Wilderness State Park and rebuild the Civilian Conservation Corp camp at Koke'e State Park.

"The next step is to get the governor to release the money," said state Rep. Mina Morita, D-14th District. "This project is something that has to be done for safety reasons. It's very important not only to visitors but to residents."

The governor's office did not return calls for comment by press time.

The 11-mile Kalalau Trail provides the only land access to revered seaside vistas, valleys and waterfalls.

Assuming the funding is released, Kaua'i Planning and Action Alliance President Diane Zachary said the first task will be reconstructing portions of the trail's first two miles — from Ke'e Beach to Hanakapi'ai.

"In addition to hiring a contractor to do the trail reconstruction work, Kaua'i Planning and Action Alliance will have a project coordinator who will solicit input on needed improvements from regular community users of the trail," she said. "This will provide us with information on trail conditions at various times of the year to assure that the solutions implemented improve the safety of the hiking experience while still maintaining it as a wilderness trail."

After work begins to repair the trail's first 2 miles, Hooser said he plans to request funding in the 2008 budget to proceed on reconstructing the remainder of the path.

Zachary said Na Pali Coast Trail must be rebuilt in stages because archaeological studies will need to be done prior to any state-funded work on the trail from mile 2 to mile 9.

"There was a good deal of habitation in the valleys there," she said.

Zachary said when the time comes she hopes the studies, which can be lengthy due to state regulations, are done in a "timely way."

"Kaua'i Planning and Action Alliance has been able to get everybody focused on what needs to be done," Morita said. "Resources are tight; we're competing for funding statewide. An organization like that has been able to help us provide the type of work that needs to be done in our state parks."

Representatives Jimmy Tokioka and Roland Sagum, who serve on the finance committee, pushed for Kaua'i to receive its fair share of funding for projects, including that to fix Na Pali Coast Trail, Morita added.

Volunteerism on the rise

Gabriela Taylor, Sierra Club's Kaua'i Group conservation chair, has hiked Na Pali Coast Trail since the early 1970s and has observed declining conditions over recent years.

"It is clearly dangerous and needs more than just a face lift," she said.

"Na Pali Coast is one of the most beautiful places on earth. It deserves a world class trail that will allow residents and visitors alike to make that spectacular hike with safer conditions than we have now."

Arius Hopman, an avid hiker from Hanapepe, traversed the trail last week and encountered drastic improvements at "Terminal Traverse," also known as "Chivalry Pass," along the most dangerous section from mile 6 to mile 8.

"I came around a bend and saw a tall man working the trail with pick and shovel. He told me he had been fixing the trail for over a month, probably over 150 hours," he said. "It was as good as it had been seven to 10 years ago."

The anonymous volunteer, an ex-Marine and stone mason, told Hopman about families he saw turn back due to the unsafe conditions and felt compelled to answer the call.

"Volunteerism is on the rise. ...It seems it is up to us to start pitching in where help is needed," Hopman said. "Complaining is just a waste of energy that could be spent fixing the problem."

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