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HB 61 RELATING TO A PARK RANGER PROGRAM

Statement for
House Committee
Water, Land Use, Development and Hawaiian Affairs
Public Hearing, 12 February 1981

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HB 61 would establish a Park Ranger Program for Hawaii to facilitate the safe and enjoyable usage of our State parks by residents and visitors. The Environmental Center statement on this bill does not represent an institutional position of the University of Hawaii.

The Department of Land and Natural Resources is delegated with the responsibility (HRS 184-6) to "preserve the parks and parkways in the State park system in their natural condition so far as may be consistent with their use and safety, and improve them in such a manner as to retain to a maximum extent their natural scenic, historic, and wildlife values for the use and enjoyment of the public" (emphasis added). The numerous incidents of crime and violence as well as the widespread and costly acts of vandalism, reduce, restrict, and in some cases eliminate the "use and enjoyment" by the public of Hawaii's State parks. Hence, park land is acquired, facilities constructed and maintained yet underutilized, representing a cost to the community not only in monetary terms but also in the loss of recreational opportunities and environmental appreciation developed through the use of a State Park. The creation of the proposed Park Ranger Program could provide a significant improvement to that situation.

We are pleased with the recognized two-fold need of the Park Ranger Program; that of providing specially trained personnel for police action and enforcement of laws, rules and regulations, and the need to provide educational information to Park visitors.

The development of the proposed Park Ranger program with appropriately trained personnel should greatly facilitate the public's usage of our State park facilities. We suggest that in the development of this program, DLNR solicit information from the National Park Service and other States with similar programs, such as California, for background information and guidance in establishing the needs and direction of Hawaii's program. Since many of the recognized problems associated with State Parks apply equally to the county parks, it would seem appropriate to consider cooperative Ranger education programs with consideration for developing, establishing or sharing joint County/State educational/training facilities for the personnel involved. Perhaps a Park Ranger education program could be developed through cooperation between the police departments and the University of Hawaii Community College System. This cooperative approach would also facilitate clarification of police and Ranger responsibilities.

The success of the Program will depend on the development of well informed, intelligent, trained and sensitive rangers who can respond appropriately to necessary enforcement situations as well as providing the visitors with educational information relevant to the specific park environments. We would hope that the creation of the Park Ranger Program will further enhance the contemporary interest in "Aloha Aina" and a much needed expansion of good will among our citizens.