

Bulldozers clear Makua — group plans fishing village

By George Garties
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Bulldozers flattened the last seven squatters' shacks on Makua Beach yesterday under the guard of pistol-toting agents of the state Department of Land and Natural Resources.

No one was there to protest the demolition, but a group of people plans to return and set up a "traditional Hawaiian fishing village," according to an attorney who says he represents some of those who had been living on the beach.

The land, near the end of Farrington Highway on the Leeward Coast, is owned by the state, which eventually plans to use it for a park. But the goal yesterday was not to begin park construction, but simply to make the shacks unlivable, according to land board chairman Susumu Ono.

Ono said the state had gotten complaints that people living on the beach had made outsiders unwelcome. Removing the shacks was a first step toward opening the area to the public, he said.

Though yesterday's operation came without warning, the groundwork had been laid in December. All but one road entrance to the three-quarter-mile stretch of beach had been blocked with piles of sand, and final eviction notices were tacked to the ramshackle dwellings Dec. 29.

Except for a few dogs, the beach was deserted when the state task force moved in about 8:30 a.m. with bulldozers, several attack dogs and several jeeploads of burly officers from the land department's Division of Conservation and Resources Enforcement.

The officers, packing pistols and radios, hung "restricted area" signs on the trees and sealed off all routes to the beach.

Officials counted three "inhabitable" dwellings and four badly damaged ones in the morning. By the time the bulldozer crews took a break for plate lunches, all that remained was one teetering shack and one lean-to based on an old panel truck.

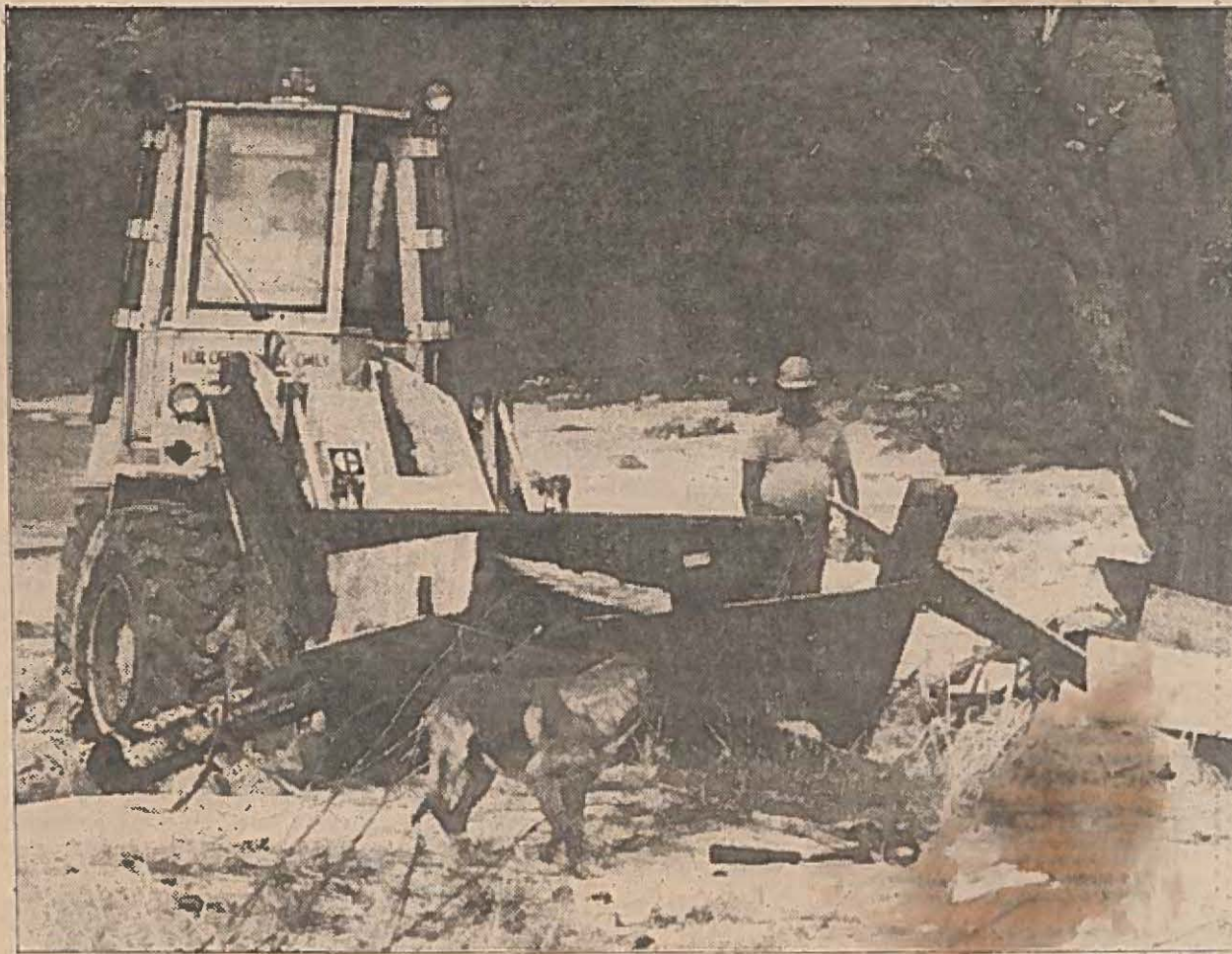
On the sand were a few piles of personal belongings — battered bureaus, plastic bags of clothing and bedding, buckets of fishing gear, a guitar. The officers had salvaged what they thought was usable.

A bulldozer flattened the last "livable" shack in about five minutes, plowing plywood, a car seat, a spool table and a painting of a pastoral scene into the beachside brush. A panel truck that apparently had served as bedroom and had at least three eviction notices tacked to it was rolled over and over and finally crushed.

The remains of the last shacks mixed with debris left by Hurricane Iwa, which ruined about 20 dwellings and accomplished the evictions the state had been trying for five or six years.

Official and unofficial estimates of Makua's full- and part-time population range from a high of 60 or 80, pre-Iwa, to a land board count of six after the storm.

Ono said the storm provided an opportunity to crack down on squatters, who, he emphasized,



A bulldozer levels a shack at Makua Beach as a dog and state worker look on.

were living illegally on public land. "If we had done nothing and permitted the people to come back on the beach and live there on an extended basis, it would have been saying 'that's OK.'"

Though the area is intended to be part of a Makua-Kaena Regional Park, there are no immediate plans for building bathrooms, or even for clearing any but the most dangerous debris. Ono said officers of the land department will make regular patrols to prevent any move back to the beach.

"What we'd like to do as a first step is to open the beach up to the public," he said.

Hayden Burgess, a trustee of the state Office of Hawaiian Affairs and a lawyer for some of the residents, said he'd like to work with the state in arranging a way "to retain the traditional Hawaiian fishing village lifestyle" at Makua. Burgess said he is spokesman for a group of 30 or 40 that formed to support the Makua regulars.

He said many people intend to live at Makua, but that he has asked them not to move back until they settle on a plan of action. "We want to work with the land department. But we will not be scared away from the land itself."

At right, demolition remnants included plastic bags of clothing and bedding, buckets of fishing gear, a guitar.

