

PRESS RELEASE

Contact Information

Mālama i ke Kai 'o Waipi'o
Media Contact: Ariel Tergeoglou
(808) 938-3320
admin@oceanaccesswaipio.org
<https://oceanaccesswaipio.org/>

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Waipi'o ocean access restored to Hawai'i Island residents:
Mayor amends February 2022 emergency restrictions.**

Honokaa, Hawaii - Big Island community group Mālama i ke Kai 'o Waipi'o (MaKa) has reached an agreement with the County to restore ocean access to Waipi'o Valley. Amendments to Mayor Roth's Emergency Proclamation now provide 4-wheel drive access to Hawai'i Island residents, as well as Native Hawaiians regardless of residency. These agreements were reached after 8 hours of skilled mediation with retired circuit court Judge Joe Cardoza.

On Feb. 25, Mayor Mitch Roth closed Waipi'o Valley Road to the general public. The road closure took many Big Island residents by surprise and provoked emotional divisions among groups of people who regularly visit Waipi'o, including Hawaiian cultural practitioners, surfers, and fishermen. A volunteer community association was formed, Mālama i ke Kai 'o Waipi'o which consists of a core group of organizers and hundreds of supporters in the local community. "We believe that the management of access into Waipi'o is necessary, especially with increased tourism and an expanding population on Hawaii Island. However, the Mayor's emergency proclamation did not directly address these issues, and severely impacted the practices and traditions of both Native Hawaiians and our local community," says Roland Shackelford, President of MaKa.

After attempts to find a resolution outside of the courts failed, MaKa filed a complaint on April 22. This complaint also represented 13 individual plaintiffs. Several important witnesses voluntarily came forward, such as retired BLNR member, attorney and former Planning Director Chris Yuen, Mack Asato, former DPW road supervisor, and Ron Terry, Ph.D a retired UH professor of Geography and principal of Geometrician Associates. UH Manoa Professor Emeritus Panos Prevedouros agreed to serve as an expert engineer witness. In response the County submitted a request for dismissal, which Judge Peter Kubota subsequently ruled against. At MaKa's request and Judge Kubota's recommendation, both parties entered into mediation. On the second day, a mediation agreement was reached to amend the Emergency Proclamation. Terms of the agreement include restored 4WD vehicular access to Hawai'i island residents and Native Hawaiians. The County also included the resumption of licensed and insured tour operations. Within six months, Director of Public Works Steve Pause will prioritize a traffic management study to address pedestrian access and road safety. Those wishing to access the valley on foot may apply to the County for an exemption.

"We are extremely happy with the County's willingness to mediate and take our community's input into consideration when utilizing its emergency powers." says Shackelford. "We thank the County for its commitment to the development of collaborative solutions, and MaKa looks forward to engaging our membership in support of this work to mālama 'āina."

For more information, please visit MaKa's website www.oceanaccesswaipio.org. The group is committed to the stewardship of Waipi'o, and welcomes new members.

