

Paddlers pull as 1 to clean filthy lagoon

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July 29, 2016



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Avid paddlers Gino and Jennifer Dayton and their son, Makana, talked Thursday with the Honolulu Police Department's Cpl. Leland Cadoy about a floating shack that ended up in the racing area after Sunday night's storms.



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Volunteers cleaned up an area Thursday at the popular Keehi Lagoon, where state canoe races will be held next week. Wanda Hanson, left, Renee Nauka, Bernie Kalama and Mele Cabato joined in the effort.

The muddy, garbage-infused muddle of junk left behind by Tropical Storm Darby in the waters and along the shoreline of Keehi Lagoon is threatening the state sport of outrigger canoe paddling's largest annual event.

And, when various government agencies skirted the problem and essentially said "no can" by citing a lack of manpower and resources, the local paddling community chose to rally behind a "can-do" attitude to address the mess.

Volunteers from various clubs and the surrounding community Thursday continued to clean up the hazardous eyesore so that the thousands of paddlers and their supporters looking forward to the Hawaiian Canoe Racing

Association State Championship regatta slated for Aug. 6 at Keehi Lagoon won't be left high and dry.

Many of the 3,300-plus competitive paddlers within the Oahu Hawaiian Canoe Racing Association were disappointed to learn Wednesday night that its championship regatta, which had initially been moved to Sunday when Darby hit hard over the weekend, had been canceled due to an unprecedented flotilla of trash and debris, including a couch, refrigerator and two floating shacks constructed at a large homeless encampment upstream of the lagoon.

In an effort to get the waterway in shape for the state races, members from OHCRA's 18 clubs joined forces with paddlers from Na 'Ohana o na Hui Wa'a and volunteers from the Maui County Hawaiian Canoe Association's Na Kai 'Ewalu to clean up the daunting heap of junk. Volunteers from the community pitched in throughout a daylong cleanup effort Thursday, and support in the form of food and donations also came from the Big Island's Moku o Hawaii Outrigger Canoe Racing Association.

Large roll-away dumpsters were provided by the city as well as via donations, including one from Honolulu Disposal that was facilitated by state Sen. Glenn Wakai, who represents District 15, which includes Kalihi, Mapunapuna and Honolulu Airport — communities that surround Keehi Lagoon. While the beach park and its near-shore waters have been under city jurisdiction since 1953, staffers from the Department of Land and Natural Resources' Division of Aquatic Resources as well as Boating and Ocean Recreation were on hand to "determine any potential mitigation or recovery efforts that will need to be undertaken," including monitoring "large debris items."

"They put out the Bat Signal, and everybody came to help," said Wakai, who assisted with the morning portion of Thursday's cleanup. "What I love is that in

the water the paddlers are fierce competitors. But they all came together as one collective canoe club to help the greater good.”

The city brought in two bulldozers to remove heavy items and large quantities of waste from the lagoon as the “bucket brigade” of volunteers raked, shoveled and carried away debris along the beach. The effort also allowed for improvements to the park, including the unearthing of a pathway leading from the parking lot to the water that had been covered and overgrown due to years of sediment deposits and runoff from a nearby shower.

Much of the remaining trash and debris has drifted downwind into a small cove toward the Airport Reef Runway, so cleanup organizers are hoping to use a floating boom to hold that mass in place until it can be removed. Additional heavy equipment from private sources is expected to be utilized today to expedite the removal process.

The Hawaii Tourism Authority also pitched in Thursday afternoon with a \$1,200 donation earmarked for the cleanup effort and supplies to support the mission. Kalani Ka‘ana‘ana, HTA’s director of Hawaiian cultural affairs, said the donation will be used to pay for additional dumpsters, gloves, rakes and garbage bags, and it represents a portion of the more than \$7 million that the organization puts toward natural resources and perpetuation of Hawaiian culture annually.

“It brings back memories of paddling as a kid when everyone played nicely together,” said OHCRA President Luana Froiseth. “I’ve received calls from all around the state, and we’ve made much more progress that I would have expected.”

Another large-scale cleanup effort at Keehi Lagoon is slated for today at 6 a.m. to assess the debris at low tide by the baseball field and again on Sunday at 7 a.m. near the race-site pavilion to spruce up the spectator area in advance of the state races. Volunteers from the general public are encouraged to join in, and participants should bring proper footwear and gloves, if possible, as well as hats and sunscreen.