



## Categorical Exclusion Form

**Project:** Proposed Bicycle Use at Kahuku

**PEPC Project Number:** 41162

**Project Description:**

This project proposes to designate the Kahuku access road up to the Upper Palm Trailhead and Palm Trail for bicycle (non-motorized) use during the hours that Kahuku is open to the public. Current use on Palm Trail consists of visitor hiking and administrative use of motorized government vehicles. The Kahuku access road supports the administrative use of motorized vehicles (government, partners and research), visitor motorized vehicles and hiking during public open hours. This project limits bicycle use to the trail and roadway and is not intended for any off-road or off-trail use. Bicycles would not be allowed past the Upper Palm Trailhead.

The Palm Trail was established over unpaved ranch roads and was opened to the public as a hiking trail in October 2011. The trail tread consists of maintained pasture grass, lava bedrock and rocky undulating hills. Trail width is generally 8-10 feet wide but can be as wide as about 12 feet. Trail maintenance is limited to grass trimming, hazardous tree removal, and loose rock removal. The Palm Trail, excluding the section of road between the Upper and Lower Trail Heads, is about 2 miles long.

The Kahuku access road is not paved with the exception of the first 4/10th mile; there are no sidewalks, lane markings or marked parking. The width of the road up to the Upper Palm Trail Head is the width of two vehicles with few short sections that narrow to a single vehicle width. There are two cattle guards (single vehicle width) along the road section to the Upper Palm Trailhead, both have been filled in with rock. The posted speed limit on the road is 15 MPH. The road surface is primarily rock and lava flows with fill of red cinder. The elevation gain from the Highway intersection with the Kahuku access road to the Upper Palm Trailhead is about 700-800 feet and is about 3 miles long.

A Green (Low), Amber (Moderate), Red (High) Risk Analysis for Mountain Bike Use was completed in 2009 for the area and activity described in this proposal. The analysis remains valid for this proposal as the general conditions and area has not changed. Several factors were taken into consideration resulting in an Amber, or Moderate overall risk. The factor with the highest risk was bicycle use with motorized vehicular traffic while on the access road. To a lesser extent, the combined use of hiking and bicycling on the Palm Trail would pose a slight risk to both user groups. To mitigate the increased risk, all visitors will be notified of the additional use of bicycles and advised to exercise caution while enjoying the park area.

There are no known rare or endangered species or cultural or historic resources along the trail or road that would be disturbed by bicycle use.

In proposing to designate the above described area for bicycle use in the Kahuku Unit, it has been determined (based on all available information) that the proposal is consistent with the protection of natural, scenic and aesthetic values, safety considerations and management objectives and will not disturb wildlife or park resources. This project will be reevaluated should the actual conditions of bicycle use exceed the above considerations or new information is received that would require further analysis.

See 'Internal Documents' in PEPC for map and public scoping notice to request public input and summary of comments and responses.

**Project Locations:**

**Location**

<b>County:</b>	Hawaii	<b>State:</b>	HI
<b>District:</b>	Kau	<b>Section:</b>	Kahuku
<b>Geo. Marker:</b>		<b>Other:</b>	

**Mitigation(s):**

- Public will be encouraged to follow park SOPs for sanitation and inspection equipment (including gear, footwear) brought into park (to avoid bringing in weeds, coqui, fire ants, etc.).
- Periodic monitoring by Kahuku staff to ensure visitors are staying on the bike path/road and not wandering off-site.

**Describe the category used to exclude action from further NEPA analysis and indicate the number of the category (see Section 3-4 of DO-12):**

D.3 Minor changes in programs and regulations pertaining to visitor activities.

**On the basis of the environmental impact information in the statutory compliance file, with which I am familiar, I am categorically excluding the described project from further NEPA analysis. No exceptional circumstances (e.g. all boxes in the ESF are marked "no") or conditions in Section 3-6 apply, and the action is fully described in Section 3-4 of DO-12.**

**Signature**



**Superintendent:**

Cindy Orlando

**Date:** 5/04/2012

**NPS Contact:** Danielle Foster, Environmental Protection Specialist

**Date:** 05/04/2012

## **Comments and Responses for Bicycle Use at Kahuku Unit (public comment period 2/23/12-3/26/12)**

**Correspondence Text** Excerpts from comments submitted on-line or by mail (6 total received).

(Corr. 1) This is an excellent opportunity to further integrate bicycling as a compatible means of travelling through our national parks. Bicycling is the fastest growing modal sector within Hawai'i County. On an island with five NPS units it is imperative to move toward a natural infrastructure that accommodates both pedestrian and bicycling travel as soon as practical. The terrain suggests an average climb of about 5-percent gradient. An unpaved surface this steep will limit the number of bicyclists with the equipment, skills and endurance necessary to reach the upper trail head. Some may choose to be shuttled to the trail head to freewheel down. The limited use should not discourage initiating use of bicycles on park trails but rather would make this a suitable pilot project that could help develop a prototype for shared-use management and operating rules on other trails within HVO and the other units as well. Ala Kahakai NHT, Kaloko-Honokohau NHP, Pu'ukohala Heiau NHS, Pu'u honua O Honaunau NHP, and Hawai'i Volcanoes NP all have some sections that would be ideal to expand the use of bicycles within national parks.

(Corr. 2) I fully support allowing bicycling on the Palm trail, as well as many other trails in the Kahuku section of the park. It would be nice if there was better parking where the upper Palm trail meets the main road.

(Corr. 3) I am writing to offer my full support in opening access to mountain biking in the Kahuku area. I am an avid mountain biker and would deeply value the experience of riding in Kahuku. I have long hoped for bike access to this beautiful spot and would do my part to be a good steward of designated trails.

(Corr. 4) Under the present use and guidelines established for the Palm Trail at the Kahuku Unit, appropriate utilization for visitor "casual" - safe recreational activities for that area as well as hour (s) limitation are acceptable. Any competitive or rigorous all - terrain use should not be encouraged, due to unwanted destruction and/or liability aftermath for misfortune. Administration - government and authorized visitor motorized vehicles would be the exception during regulated and appropriate dates.

(Corr. 5) The Mission Critical Administrative Aviation Plan/Environmental Assessments for "Bicycle Use in Limited Areas at Kahuku Unit," "General Management Plan/Wilderness Study/Environmental Impact Statement," and "Air Tour Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement," contained in your letter dated February 23, 2012, have been reviewed. We have no concerns or objections at this time.

(Corr. 6) Thank you for your February 23, 2012 letter inviting comment on the subject project. The Kahuku Unit lies within the planning area of the Ka'u Community Development Plan (CDF). The planning process for the Ka'u CDP is underway ([www.kaucdp.info](http://www.kaucdp.info)). The Ka'u CDP

Steering Committee has adopted a Values and Vision Statement as well as Community Objectives, both of which are based on extensive community input and research. Values and priorities, as they relate to the proposed bicycle use, include: access, outdoor recreation, recreation facilities, natural resource protection, and economic opportunity through strategies that include tourism. Related Community Objectives include:

- Protect, restore, and enhance ecosystems, including mauka forests and the shorelines, while assuring responsible access for residents and for visitors.
- Protect, restore, and enhance Ka`u's unique cultural assets, including archeological and historic sites and historic buildings.
- Establish a rural transportation network, including roadway alternatives to Highway 11, a regional trail system, and an interconnected transit system.
- Increase the number and diversity of income sources for residents, including jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities that complement Ka`u's ecology, culture and evolving demographics.

With that community guidance in mind, it appears that the proposed bicycle use is consistent with the community's goals, particularly to the extent that it protects cultural and natural resources, increases responsible mauka access, connects to the existing and future proposed elements of the regional trail and road system, provides greater opportunity for outdoor recreation, and provides amenities that support locally-managed tourism.

## **Responses**

The bicycle use on Palm Trail will be on a trial basis. The park will monitor for potential trail user conflicts and unacceptable impacts, and then will determine if the use will continue as is, be modified (e.g. day of week or time of day restrictions), be discontinued, or may be expanded to other areas if level of impacts remains acceptable.

Expansion of bicycle use in other areas of the park, including other locations in the Kahuku Unit, is being addressed in the General Management Plan/Wilderness Study/Environmental Impact Statement.

For Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act compliance, the following condition is required: periodic monitoring by Kahuku staff to ensure visitors are staying on the bike path and not wandering off-site.

The monitoring conducted for Section 106 compliance will also allow the park to monitor impacts to natural resources. Modifications and/or restrictions may be implemented based on the monitoring results.

# HAWAII VOLCANOES NATIONAL PARK

