

H O N O L U L U Weekly

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SOME 20 MILLION AMERICANS turned out for events on the first Earth Day, April 22, 1970. Since then the celebration has seen some ups and downs, but it remains an opportunity to reflect on how we're caring for our planet. The decisions that are being made now will affect our lives for generations to come. Instead of waiting until it's convenient, or imperative, that we act, the time to take action is now, while the environment is not beyond repair. The decision to get involved can be a personal one, with changes in our individual lifestyles: buying products that are environmentally friendly, recycling, boycotting companies whose environmental records are especially egregious. Or it can be at the ballot box.

Over the past decade in Hawaii, the environmental community has emerged as the fastest-growing voting block. With increasing sophistication and organization, people who care about the environment have garnered numerous electoral victories.

In 1988 citizens voted by a 2-to-1 margin in favor of saving the Sandy Beach coastline from development.

In 1990 exit polls demonstrated that voters concerned about the environment made the crucial difference in the race between Daniel Akaka and Pat Saiiki for the U.S. Senate. In that same year developer-backed City Councilman David Kahanu was upset by political neophyte and Sierra Club activist Steve Holmes.

The Sierra Club, the Coalition of Conservation Voters and the Sandy Beach Coalition have increased their participation in the electoral process. Their endorsements carry more weight every year.

Observers report that Mike Wilson's appointment as chairman of the Board of Land and Natural Resources and Gary Gill's appointment as director of the Office of Environmental Quality Control are directly attributable to the involvement of environmentalists in the 1994 gubernatorial race.

As these victories indicate, the power of the environmental movement has steadily increased over recent years. But many locals have long been active in the fight to protect the Islands from environmental degradation. In recognition of their efforts, *Honolulu Weekly* here offers insights into a few of the most influential environmental groups in the state. The list is by no means comprehensive; single-issue organizations have been omitted as well as various smaller organizations. We hope you'll do your own investigating if you're interested in groups not profiled here. Or, better yet, start your own.

Group Efforts

CURT SANBURN

LIFE OF THE LAND (LOL)



Founded by a group of housewives in 1970 (the same year as the first Earth Day) to voice concerns about sewage off Waikiki, Life of the Land has become synonymous with environmental activism in Hawaii. The Waikiki sewage ruckus got front-page coverage in the *Wall Street Journal* and forced the City and County of Honolulu to build the first sewage system in the state, reversing a long-standing tradition of dumping raw sewage into the Pacific's seeming infinity.

In its heyday during the 1970s, LOL was responsible for many of Hawaii's early environmental, zoning and planning laws and regulations. LOL's troops fought to establish the Neighborhood Board system on Oahu, to end the bombing of Kahoolawe, to stop the mining of Molokai's sands and to gain state control over groundwater sources. Leaders of LOL included Tony Hodges, Bob Durant, Sophie Ann Aoki, Phil Estermann and Gavan Daws.

After a long relatively fallow period, LOL has come back to vigorous life under the leadership of the six-member board of directors and Executive Director Henry Curtis, 43, who during his year-long tenure has built the LOL membership list back up to 2,000 from a few hundred. Current issues bird-dogged by LOL include the fate of the Ka Iwi (Sandy Beach to Makapuu) coastline, impacts of the proposed Ewa Marina, the Lihī Lani development on the North Shore, expansion of airports, Ko Olina public beach access, public trail access, the explosion in microwave transmission sites and preserving and diversifying agriculture.

Curtis makes a point of networking with other environmental groups at biweekly meetings of the Environmental Legislative Network. He is fond of showing up at the meetings of obscure government agencies, things like the Office of State Planning's confab on the future of Barbers Point and the state's Agri-Business Development Corp. meetings, where, very quietly, bureaucrats are planning state policy on possible uses for former sugar plantation lands.

For more information call the LOL office at 533-3454.