At the Intersection of Resident, Research and Recreation Stakeholder Interests: The Hawaiian Islands as a Sustainable Tourism Destination

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About the speaker: Dr. Cusick coordinates the Environmental Studies undergraduate degree and certificate programs and is faculty advisor for the Ecology Club, which is supported by the Ecological Society of America Strategies for Ecology Education, Development, and Sustainability (SEED) program. His research interests in the area of human-environment relationships focus on places designated protected area status, with an emphasis on World Heritage sites, where the interests of residents, conservation research and tourism merge. He was an East-West Center Degree Fellow and his dissertation compared protected areas on the islands of Maui and Yakushima, Japan. He is a member of the IUCN World Commissions on Protected Areas and Ecosystem Management and the UHM Center for Okinawan Studies, and has conducted fieldwork related to sustainable development in the Hawaiian Islands, Japan, New Zealand, North America, and Latin America. In 2009, he organized curriculum and field study programs on Maui and California for an East-West Center environmental leadership program for international students.

Abstract

Resident communities, protected area management, and the tourism industry stakeholders demonstrate that evolving relationships are complex webs of competing and cooperating interests. The geographic isolation of the Hawaiian Islands makes travel to and from primary markets in North America and Asia unsustainable. However, partnerships have brought about and nurtured the perpetuation of culture and the conservation of biodiversity as stakeholders recognize shared benefits that still attract large numbers of visitors. A sustainability framework for tourism suggests a reappraisal of how to nurture, not alter, Hawai‘i’s environmental diversity. This presentation will review the results of two events in 2009 that brought stakeholders together to discuss the following questions: What does sustainable tourism look like in Hawai‘i?; What are the challenges to reach that goal?; and What roles do individuals and organizations play to achieve the goal of sustainability for the Hawaiian Islands?