

Draft Environmental Assessment

Pohoiki Road and Highway 137 Road Repair and Water Line Installation

County of Hawai'i, Hawai'i

DR-4366-HI PW-55 and PW-53

August 2023



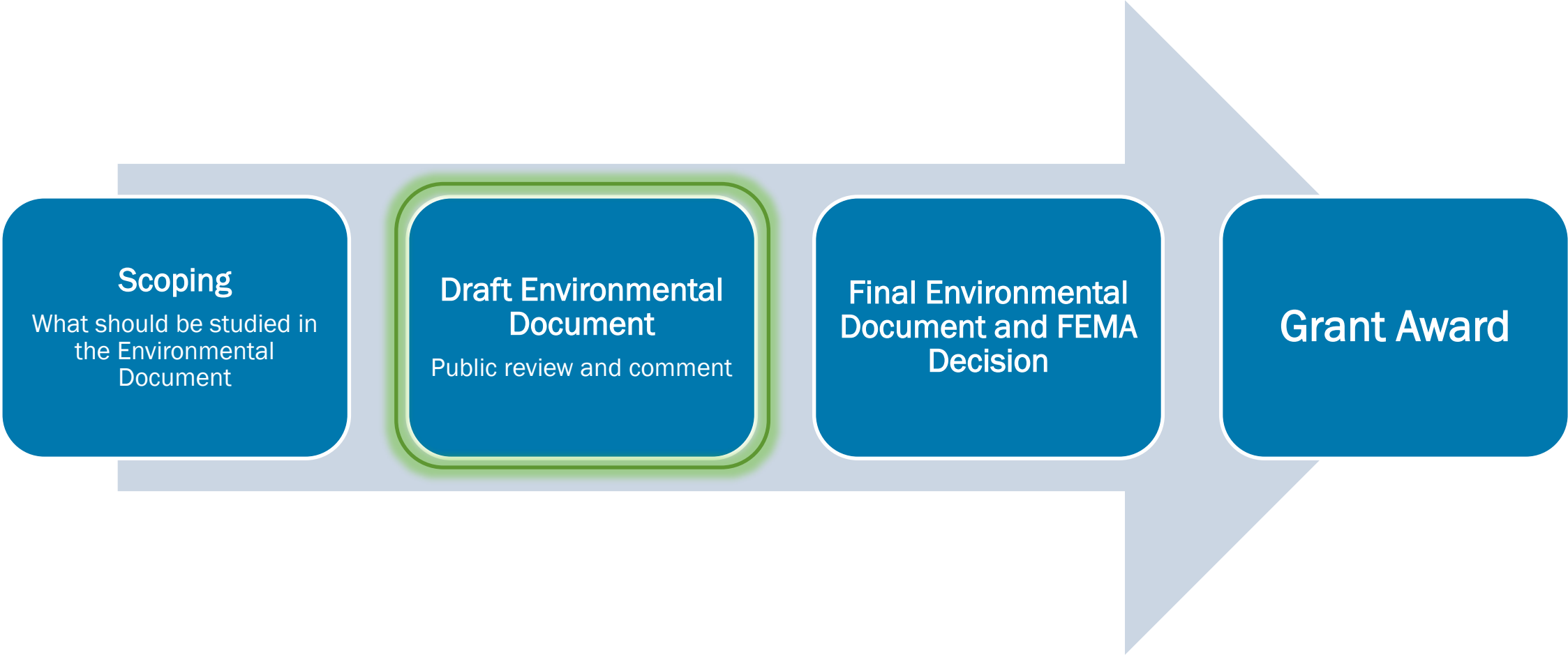
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Introduction

- The County of Hawai'i Department of Public Works (DPW) and the County of Hawai'i Department of Water Supply (DWS) both applied to FEMA through the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency (HI-EMA) for funding to repair roads and install water lines under FEMA's Public Assistance Program.
- FEMA is reviewing that grant request, including a review of the potential environmental impacts of the proposed project.
- The Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) summarizes the analysis of potential environmental impacts of the proposed project.



Environmental Review Process



Environmental Review Process

The environmental review process includes an evaluation of impacts and compliance with federal laws, regulations, and Executive Orders:

National Environmental Policy Act

- Requires federal agencies to incorporate environmental considerations in their planning and decision-making

Biological Resources

- Endangered Species Act
- Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act
- Magnuson Stevenson Act
- Migratory Bird Treaty Act

Water Resources

- Executive Orders 11988 (Floodplains) and 11990 (Wetlands)
- Federal Flood Risk Management Standard Interim Policy
- Clean Water Act
- Coastal Zone Management Act
- Wild and Scenic Rivers Act

Cultural/Native Hawaiian Resources

- National Historic Preservation Act
- Native Hawaiian Organization Consultation
- Section 106 Consultation

Social Resources

- Executive Order 12898 (Environmental Justice)
- Resource Conservation and Recovery Act
- Clean Air Act
- Farmland Protection Policy Act

Project Purpose

- **Reconnect** areas isolated by hardened lava to the rest of the island, allowing the following:
 - Traffic flow to resume
 - Property owners to recover from the disaster
 - Increased access to recreational areas
- Provide **emergency response services** access to this area, provide **multiple emergency evacuation routes**, and **improve economic stability** by providing improved access to homes, businesses, and agricultural lands in the project area.



Photo of lava flow in the project area, facing southeast (Ka Wai O Pele [Green Lake] in upper left-hand corner).



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Project Need

The project is needed to address three primary concerns in the project area after the 2018 volcanic eruption:

- **Inaccessible Roads** - The lava flows damaged 6.7 miles of roads in the project area, completely isolating homes, recreational areas, and agricultural fields. The County built a temporary road along Highway 137 near MacKenzie State Recreation Area, which provides a single access route to the project area.
- **Unusable Water Lines** - The lava flows damaged 5.9 miles of water lines in the project area, impacting public drinking water service to and through the project area, and restricting economic development.
- **Economic Recovery including Access to Recreational Coastline Areas** - Hardened lava is as high as 65 feet above the original elevation in some parts of the project area, burying agricultural fields and recreational areas, and limiting access to the recreational coastline areas, which limits economic recovery.



Alternatives Considered

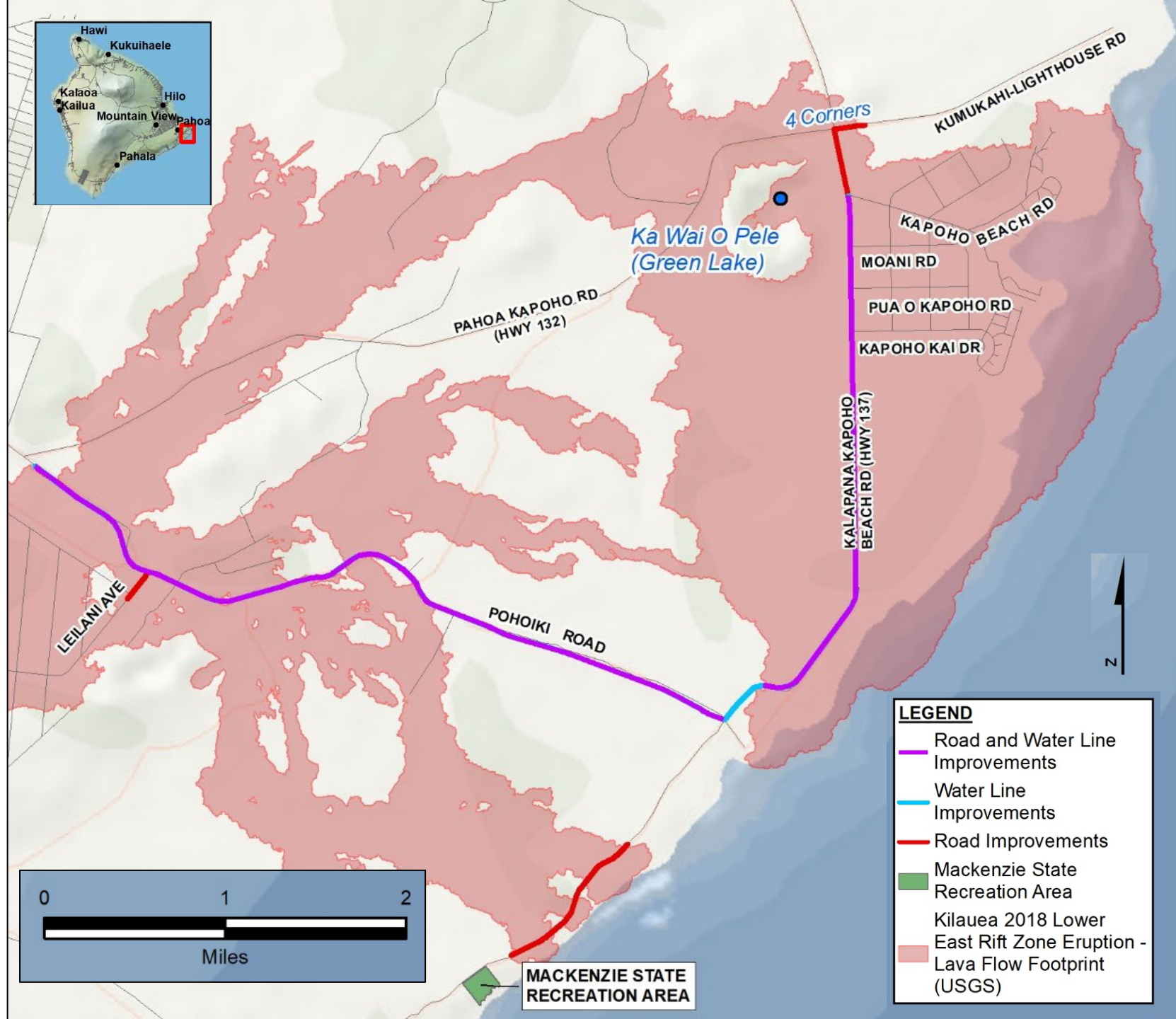
No Action Alternative

Future conditions if no additional action is taken.

Proposed Action

The County of Hawai'i proposes to implement two projects that are geographically connected:

- Realign and reconstruct approximately 9.1 miles of **roads** to bring them back to their pre-disaster function
- Install **water lines** along approximately 7.8 miles of roads



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NEPA Evaluation

- Considered the environment potentially affected by the alternatives
- Evaluated potential environmental impacts over the short-term (during construction) and over the long-term
- Recommended measures to avoid or reduce those impacts
- Potential impacts for each resource area were determined to be none/negligible or minor



Potential Impacts & Mitigation: *Geology, Topography, and Soils*

- The project would affect up to 95.4 acres identified as Agricultural Lands of Importance to the State of Hawai'i, or farmland of statewide importance.
 - 9.5 acres are covered by 2018 lava flow
 - The County selected an alignment through agricultural land that largely avoids the exceptional mango trees that grow along Pohoiki Road and are protected by a state statute and local County ordinance.
- The project would convert farmland along Pohoiki Road into non-agricultural uses; however, farming would still be viable in this area.
- FEMA coordinated with the Natural Resources Conservation Service in compliance with the Farmland Protection Policy Act.

Photo of Pohoiki Road, facing northwest. Intersection of Pohoiki Road and Highway 137 at lower right-hand corner of photo.

Potential Impacts & Mitigation: *Surface Waters and Water Quality; Coastal Resources*

- Negligible short-term impacts on surface waters, water quality, and coastal resources because construction work would be done in conformance with state and local standards, guidelines, and best management practices.
- Long-term benefits to coastal resources from conformance with local conservation guidelines and additional access to scenic areas and beaches.



Photo of hardened lava along coastline near the northern portion of Highway 137, facing northeast. Isaac Hale Beach Park in lower left-hand corner.

Potential Impacts & Mitigation: *Biological Resources*

- Minor long-term impacts from the removal of vegetation.
- Minor long-term impacts on some bird species because of the removal of a small amount of 'ōhi'a forest.
- FEMA consulted with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service regarding potential impacts of the project on the 11 threatened and endangered species that have the potential to occur in the project area. The Service concurred with FEMA's determination that the project may affect but is not likely to adversely affect federally listed species.
- Mitigation measures to minimize impacts on vegetation and wildlife include limiting vegetation clearing to that which is necessary for project completion, pre-construction nest surveys, and worker education.



Potential Impacts & Mitigation: *Cultural Resources*

- FEMA conducted an archaeological reconnaissance survey of the project area in the summer of 2022.
- FEMA consulted with Native Hawaiian Organizations and Lineal Descendants.
- FEMA also consulted with the State Historic Preservation Division (SHPD). SHPD concurred with FEMA's determination that the proposed action would result in No Historic Properties Affected. SHPD agreed with FEMA's proposal that archaeological monitoring occur during project construction to avoid and minimize potential impacts on cultural resources.
- The archaeological monitoring plan requires that if any burials or cultural resources are inadvertently discovered, work will stop in the immediate area and SHPD, Office of Hawaiian Affairs, Native Hawaiian Organizations, and Native Hawaiian lineal descendants and the appropriate Hawaiian Burial Council will be contacted for consultation, as necessary.



Potential Impacts & Mitigation: *Transportation, Utilities, and Public Health & Safety*

- During construction, work would be staged to maintain access to the project area.
- Long-term benefits:
 - Improve the transportation network
 - Provide water service to the project area
 - Improve access for emergency services
 - Provide multiple evacuation routes



Photo of hardened lava across Highway 137 near MacKenzie State Recreation Area, facing northeast (photo shows temporary road rebuilt after 2018 lava flow).



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Potential Impacts & Mitigation: *Other Resource Areas*

Affected Resource Area	Impacts
Visual Quality and Aesthetics	Minor short- and long-term impacts
Air Quality and Climate	Minor short- and long-term impacts
Wetlands and Floodplains	No short- or long-term impacts
Environmental Justice	No disproportionately high and adverse impacts on minority or low-income populations
Hazardous Materials	Negligible short-term impacts and minor long-term impacts
Noise	Minor short- and long-term impacts
Land Use and Zoning	No short-term impacts; negligible long-term impacts

Potential impacts and mitigation measures are summarized in Table 8 of the Draft EA.



Next Steps in the NEPA Process

- The 30-day public comment period for the Draft EA ends on **Tuesday, September 5, 2023**. Written comments must be submitted directly to FEMA Region 9 on or before that date.
 - Information on how to provide a comment is shown on the next slide.
- FEMA will review public comments received.
- Depending on the comments received, FEMA may adopt the EA as final, issue a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), and fund the project.
 - If public comments require further consultation with agencies or other organizations, the overall timeline may be affected.



Commenting on the Draft EA

Where to find the Draft EA

- **Online** at the FEMA website:
<https://www.fema.gov/emergency-managers/practitioners/environmental-historic/nepa-repository>
- **Online** at the County website:
<https://www.dpw.hawaiicounty.gov/resources/bulletins#Engineering>
- **Hard Copies** are available in person:
 - Hawai'i County Department of Public Works Office (Aupuni Center, 101 Pauahi Street, Suite 7, Hilo, HI 96720)
 - Hawai'i County Department of Public Works Office (West Hawai'i Civic Center, 75-5044 Ane Keohokalole Highway, Bldg. D, 1st Floor, Kailua-Kona, HI 96740)

How to comment on the Draft EA

Written comments on the Draft EA must be submitted to FEMA. Comments will be accepted through **Tuesday, September 5, 2023:**

- **By email:** fema-rix-ehp-documents@fema.dhs.gov
Please include “Puna Road Repair and Water Line Installation” in your subject line
- **By mail:**
Regional Environmental Officer
FEMA Region 9
1111 Broadway, Suite 1200
Oakland, CA 94607-4052

Reminder: Comments or questions submitted during this meeting will not be officially considered. Comments on the Draft EA must be submitted in writing to FEMA.



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