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## **Hawai`i Volcanoes NEWS RELEASE**

**November 03, 2005**

### **Respect the Land, Honor the Culture Leave the Rocks in their Rightful Place**

The act establishing Hawai`i Volcanoes National Park on August 1, 1916, states that the area was “set apart to conserve volcanic features, endemic Hawaiian ecosystems, Hawaiian cultural and archeological remains and inherent scenic values.”

The task of protecting natural and cultural resources while providing for the enjoyment of the same requires public education and cooperation. It is vital that each of the park’s 2.5 million visitors a year recognizes their challenge and personal responsibility to protect the integrity of the park and the culture of Hawai`i’s indigenous people.

Currently, an escalation of a prohibited activity by some park visitors has degraded the natural environment and offends many native Hawaiians.

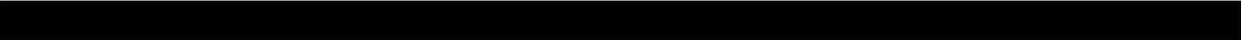
More and more visitors are gathering and stacking rocks in piles along trails, at overlooks, and on lava lakes. The activity is illegal. Federal law 36 CFR 2.1 (a) (1) (iv) prohibits “possessing, destroying, injuring, defacing, removing, or disturbing from its natural state all mineral resources.”

The practice is also unseemly. The proliferation of rock piles (sometimes numbering in the hundreds) destroys the geological story and creates an environment unnaturally manipulated by the human hand. It is disturbing to see the glassy veneer broken and pried off of the surface of recent lava flows along Crater Rim Drive and Chain of Craters Road where visitors have collected rocks for their piles.

The situation is especially bad at Halema`uma`u Crater. In May 1924, a series of rare steam explosions blasted stone fragments of varying size and shape high into the air. These rocks rained down upon the surrounding landscape. Until recently, this dramatic scattering of rocky debris, lying undisturbed in silent testimony to nature’s fury, withstood the test of time. Now a sea of rock piles prevails.

An ongoing commitment of staff time is required to dismantle the piles, as the appearance of even one stack of rocks is enough to generate a “copy cat” syndrome.

Visitors may see ahu (stone cairns) within the park that were built long ago by Hawaiians to mark trails, ahupua`a (land divisions) and other significant sites. They are important cultural artifacts.



Park crews erect ahu at staggered points along trails to mark a hiker's pathway. Rock piles built by visitors can disorient hikers, leading them astray.

Hawaiian elders teach malama `aina, care for the land. At Kilauea, where the very ground is sacred to the Hawaiian people, they say e nihi ka hele, walk softly.

According to Park Superintendent Cindy Orlando, "Visitors can help protect the park's dynamic landscape by leaving everything—even the rocks—in its rightful place."

The park will initiate a campaign to educate visitors and tour operators about the importance of preserving the park's natural beauty.

Plans are underway to distribute an informational handout, install signs where rock piles are most abundant, set-up temporary exhibits at Kilauea Visitor Center and Jaggar Museum, and join together with partnering agencies to thoughtfully dismantle the rock piles.

"We look to our local communities to assist us in communicating the value of resource protection and preserving the park in perpetuity. Islandwide, we are all in this together," said Orlando.

Cooperation through education is key. However, failure to comply is a misdemeanor that could result in a maximum six month jail term and \$5,000 fine.