12/17/20-FAMOUS HAWAIʻI NATURAL LANDMARK REOPENS AFTER 9 MONTH CLOSURE

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DEPARTMENT OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES
News Release

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FAMOUS HAWAIʻI NATURAL LANDMARK REOPENS AFTER 9 MONTH CLOSURE

Visitors Welcomed Back to Diamond Head State Monument

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(HONOLULU)–Just before the gate opened at Diamond Head State Monument (DHSM) at 6 a.m., a relatively short string of cars began cueing up. Their passengers, and numerouscyclists and pedestrians became the first visitors to the iconic park, since it was closed exactly nine months ago due to COVID-19 concerns.

DLNR Division of State Parks bosses Curt Cottrell and Alan Carpenter participated in live television interviews all morning and shared the steps the division took to best ensure the safety of visitors during the current pandemic.

Among the health safety measures instituted at Diamond Head are a mask mandate when around others, physical distancing, and not lingering at the top of the crater, where inpre-coronavirus times, visitors would spend hours snapping selfies, scenic photos, and enjoying the views from Hawai‘i Kai to Waikīkī and beyond.

Cottrell complimented his staff and volunteers for the work they put in getting DHSM ready for its long-anticipated reopening. Cassandra Springer is the only full-time park interpretive center coordinator assigned to Diamond Head. She said,“I only reminded a couple of people to wear their masks. We know the 225-foot, two-way pedestrian tunnel near the top of the summit trail was going to be a challenge because there’s just no way to physically separate people no matter which direction they’re heading. We’re just asking visitors to move through the tunnel as quickly as possible, to not stop, and to avoid congregating at either end or for that matter anywhere else in

the park.”Two maintenance workers are also assigned to DHSM. and they helped put up twenty new health and safety signs throughout the park.

The first visitors to DHSM seemed to be mostly locals; several who could barely contain their glee. One woman said she really missed her daily hike to the top of the crater over the past nine months. State Parks officials are making daily assessments of how their new protocols are working and the real test will come when tourism recovers and as many as 3,000-6,000 people could be expected to visit each day. Later in the day there was a shift from those getting free entrance to those paying ten bucks to enter. Cottrell said,“That’s good for our parking vendor who needs to at least break even to remain viable to manage parking and entrance activity.”

Prior to the COVID-19 crisis, DHSM entrance fees brought in slightly more than $1 million annually to help fund park operations, maintenance, staffing, and improvements. During one TV interview Cottrell commented,“Our entrance fees were static for twenty years. We’ve increased our rates for walk-ins from $1 to $5 and for cars from $5 to $10. We have a scaled increase for commercial vehicles once they return. Residents used to have to pay but to be in alignment with all of our other parks, Diamond Head is now free for Hawai‘i residents. Prior to COVID we had projected a 3.5 to 4-million-dollar revenue stream from Diamond Head. It’s going to be difficult to calculate actual numbers until we see how tourism recovers.”

For now, the number of people in the park and on the trail will be partially regulated by the parking lot capacity. If it’s full, cars, pedestrians and bicyclists may be asked to wait on the other side of the combined vehicle/pedestrian tunnel until others clear out.

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