



Don't Put Your Head (or a Shovel) in the Sand

by Karen Bryan

Digging or taking sand from the beaches or any area on Marine Corps Base Hawaii (MCBH) is prohibited. With this article, we hope to bring awareness to the issue, explain why we cannot dig or take sand from the beaches at MCBH, and tell you how to get sand.

The most important reason not to dig or remove sand is because the beaches and sand dunes on all MCBH properties are ancient archaeological sites. Prior to Western contact in the 1700s, native Hawaiians who lived at Mōkapu Peninsula, Waimānalo, and Pu'uloa buried their loved ones in the sand. If we dig in sandy areas, human skeletal remains or "iwi" could be unearthed. Prior to strict environmental protocols to protect natural and cultural resources, sand was moved from the coastal areas to inland areas for various construction projects. As a result, we cannot dig anywhere on MCBH without an environmental assessment and/or permit. Today, the shoreline of MCBH is designated as the Mōkapu Burial Area and is culturally sensitive. Please respect those who came before, and do not remove sand or stones from where they lie.

There are several environmental reasons not to remove sand. You may have noticed erosion at Ft. Hase and Hale Koa Beaches where the dunes are being washed away during high tides? Natural erosion from wind-driven waves is taking a toll on the shoreline at MCBH. Removing sand from the beach could accelerate coastal erosion and make the beach unsuitable for training or recreational purposes. We all enjoy relaxing at MCBH beaches, so please leave

the sand and dunes undisturbed.

MCBH's beaches are home to federally protected marine life. Hawaiian green sea turtles and other species of sea turtles nest on MCBH beaches. Green sea turtles were once endangered due to human impacts such as poaching and harvesting of eggs, incidental catch from the fishing industry, entanglement or ingestion of marine debris, and habitat destruction. The green sea turtle population is recovering as a result of enforcement of the Endangered Species act of 1978; however, they remain listed as threatened in Hawaii and are still considered endangered in other regions. 2020 has been an unprecedented year for Hawaiian green sea turtle nesting on MCBH properties. Be alert for turtle tracks and/or fenced areas containing nests. If you accidentally disturb a nest, you face jail time and a fine of up to \$15,000.

Now that you have a better understanding of why you shouldn't dig or remove sand from the beaches, where can you get sand for sandbags or pits? Contact Self Help at (808) 257-3186 to see if sand is available. State law prohibits the removal of sand from any beach in Hawaii; so, if sand is not available from Self Help, you must purchase bagged sand commercially at a building or home improvement retailer. Another option is to purchase bulk quantities of loose sand (1 ton minimum) from local building suppliers. Please respect wildlife and cultural remains—don't dig on Base or remove sand from our beaches. For more information about natural resources and the cultural history of MCBH, please visit:

<https://www.mcbhawaii.marines.mil/Offices-Staff/S-4-Installations-Environment-Logistics/Environmental/>