



Printed by: Diane Tarkenton

Printed on: March 9, 2016

Hawaii Is Losing Its Beaches

"Do you build a seawall and potentially condemn the beach to extinction in front of the seawall, but at the same time buy a lot of time for homeowners on the nearby land to figure out how to move away from that situation?" asked Fletcher. "Or do you not build a seawall, condemning the homes and the developed land to extinction, but [allowing] the beach to survive?"

Property owners who want to build a seawall would need to get permission from the state government. To do this, they would have to direct a study into the environmental effects of a seawall in the hopes of getting a state permit. This could take months.

In the short term, residents were hoping to receive emergency authorization to place sandbags and tarps in front of their properties to deflect the waves. Krystle Dombrowski, whose family owns two houses next to the Lunt's that they rent to vacationers, tried this. Dombrowski, her husband, some friends, and volunteers ran out of burlap sacks and had to buy pillowcases at Wal-Mart. These made for bright orange, red, and polka dot sandbags.

"We need something that's structurally sound, something that is really big, that can help us," Dombrowski said.

But sandbags can't work forever. In the long term, both Fletcher and coastal lands office administrator Sam Lemmo believe that government agencies should encourage people to move away from the coast. This would eliminate the question of whether seawalls should be built.

"We need to accommodate the erosion, allow it to occur, and we need to move away from it so it doesn't affect our lives," Lemmo said. Fletcher added that the government could buy up the property and turn it into public parks.

Erosion like this will likely happen again, Fletcher said, as sea levels rise. This is especially true, he said, in places where sand dunes have been landscaped out of existence or are locked up by development.

"The event on the North Shore is a warning for all of us in Hawaii that these sorts of occurrences are part of our future," Fletcher warned.

The Associated Press contributed to this story.