

Besides helping Hawaii, windsurfing is clean fun

I am standing just outside the shorebreak, booms in hand, board pointed out to sea. I test the wind strength by raising my sail slightly. A gust rips it out of my hands and the whole rig starts drifting downwind.

I start over with a sigh. This is the third time in a row I've lost it. The wind is on today, but I am off.

This time I'm more careful. I raise the sail just a little, testing, testing. Take a step, get ready . . . then . . . UP! I leap onto the board and I'm flying.

The board skims along the water as I get settled in my harness and foot straps. Look out — there's a sea turtle. I give it a wide berth, but it doesn't pay much attention.

I speed along, enjoying the sun on the pali and the good feeling that comes with the mastering of a difficult sport.

Good exercise, the pali, warm water, strong winds, sea turtles.

Is this heaven?

It's Kailua Bay on a great windsurfing day.

The sport of sailing surfboards has been around in Hawaii for a long time. In 1935, Thomas Blake, a surfing friend of Duke Kahanamoku, rigged a sail onto a paddleboard at the Outrigger Canoe Club.

But it wasn't until the 1960s that windsurfing took off in Southern California, and in the last 15 years it has become popular throughout the world.

People who love to windsurf crave strong winds, warm water and, in a perfect world, good scenery. So guess which state is windsurf heaven? Hawaii is to windsurfers what Aspen is to skiers.

Not everyone here sees this as a plus. Some people view the sport as a nuisance that clutters up the beaches and scares swimmers. The unfortunate result of this has been squabbling over territory, particularly in Kailua Beach Park.

The rules do not allow windsurfers inside the buoyed swimming area of the park. That leaves the boat ramp area south of the buoys and a small area north of the buoys.

Both these places pose problems for windsurfers. The boat ramp space, while roomy, is upwind of the swimming area. This means that beginners drift into the no-no space.

Starting at the other end prevents this, but the area is too small for the numbers involved. The place is so packed with sailboards and people that they overflow onto the narrow beach in front of houses, a sore point to some waterfront homeowners.

The Council passed Councilman



OCEAN WATCH

By Susan Scott

David Kahanu's Bill 132 to ban commercial windsurfing lessons in Kailua Beach Park on holidays and during most weekend hours, but the mayor vetoed it.

And just in time for the long Memorial Day weekend the Council overrode the mayor's veto, putting the ban into immediate effect.

In a letter to the Hawaii Amateur Windsurfing Association International Inc., Mayor Fasi said that "if conflicts arise and additional measures must be imposed, we feel that the rules and regulations can be amended as the proper vehicle rather than resorting to Draconian measures and enacting an ordinance as was proposed in Bill 132."

Well put. A law that says no lessons on holidays and weekends is not the answer. This only hurts people who live here and work regular hours.

What will help, says HAWAII spokesman John Twelker, is making the windsurfing space a little bigger and the swimming space a little smaller. Move the downwind swimming buoys a few hundred feet toward Lanikai. This gives windsurfers space to set up, launch and park the boards.

Windsurfing is an asset to Hawaii. It lets people enjoy the ocean without killing anything and without polluting. If we love our ocean, we should wish more people would take it up.

This sport is good exercise, challenging and fun — all things that make people feel good.

Yes, the boards sometimes reach high speeds and beginners can't always go where they want to go. But the same goes for skiing, and we don't see states discouraging skiers.

This sport is something different, a change from what many people are used to seeing on the windward sides of our islands. But times change. Windsurfers will not go away, nor should we want them to. Let's encourage those who come here to enjoy our water and make room for this great sport.

Susan Scott is a marine science writer and author of *Oceanwatcher*, a guide to Hawaii's marine animals. Her *Oceanwatch* column appears Monday in the *Star-Bulletin*.