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GOVERNOR OF HAWAII



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**TESTIMONY OF THE CHAIRPERSON  
OF THE BOARD OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES**

**on House Bill 2464 – Relating to Fire Protection**

**BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON  
PUBLIC SAFETY AND MILITARY AFFAIRS**

**January 31, 2008**

House Bill 2464 requires a forestry and wildlife manager to declare hazardous fire areas during fire danger periods and impose restrictions on the use of certain land over which the Department of Land and Natural Resources (Department) has direct fire responsibility, and directs the Department to establish a task force to develop a statewide hazardous fire area program. The Department does not support this measure because it needlessly duplicates or weakens existing authorities under chapter 185, Hawaii Revised Statutes (HRS), and will duplicate or replace more effective regional multi-agency wildfire cooperative working groups.

The Department has existing authorities under Chapter 185, HRS (Land Fire Protection Law), to restrict uses of state land during periods of high fire danger. Under the Land Fire Protection Law, the Department can restrict public access to state lands or areas of concern, and periods of time due to hazardous fire conditions. The Department regulates these restrictions based on the Keetch-Byrum Drought Index, which is commonly used to gauge the severity of drought conditions in Hawaii. Depending on the severity and local conditions, the drought conditions may trigger a public media advisory notifying the public of high fire danger areas and if severe enough, eventual closure of forest reserves and other areas under the Department's management. The Department works closely with its federal, state, and county agencies in evaluating drought and fire danger and responding as needed.

SECTION 2 of the bill directs the Department to establish a task force to develop a statewide hazardous fire area program. The Department currently coordinates with federal, state, and county agencies and local communities in regional wildfire working groups that function within their statutory, jurisdictional and operational boundaries to address regional needs. On the Big Island, both an East and West Hawaii working group has been formed and are instrumental in helping implement regional fuel hazard reduction programs in areas of high fire risk and coordinating fire response, particularly on the west side of the Island. The Department prefers the approach to coordinate within these regional working groups, rather than creating a separate statewide task force and program, because the regional working groups are better able to address local conditions, fire variability, and respond to local needs. Additionally, the Department is

opposed to delegating its responsibility and authority to declare hazardous fire conditions on its lands to the County Fire Chiefs under a statewide program. The Department needs to retain that management responsibility and authority.