

**TESTIMONY**

**SB 167**

**LATE**

(M. Fox?)

LATE

Testimony of The Nature Conservancy of Hawai'i  
Commenting S.B. 167 Relating to Conservation Corps  
Senate Committee on Water, Land, Agriculture & Hawaiian Affairs  
January 30, 2009, 3:00PM, Room 229

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*The Nature Conservancy of Hawai'i is a private non-profit conservation organization dedicated to the preservation of Hawai'i's native plants, animals, and ecosystems. The Conservancy has helped to protect nearly 200,000 acres of natural lands for native species in Hawai'i. Today, we actively manage more than 32,000 acres in 11 nature preserves on O'ahu, Maui, Hawai'i, Moloka'i, Lāna'i, and Kaua'i. We also work closely with government agencies, private parties and communities on cooperative land and marine management projects.*

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The Nature Conservancy provides the following comments on H.B. 167.

The notion of a Conservation Corps for at-risk persons to develop life and job skills is laudable. Indeed, the Emergency Environmental Work Force (EEWF) established by the Legislature after September 11, 2001 produced job opportunities and significant conservation benefit. Many of those workers are still employed in conservation today. However, a foundation of support is needed to ensure the effectiveness of the Conservation Corps.

The existing conservation programs that will likely be tapped to coordinate and supervise Conservation Corps workers are facing severe cutbacks. The Island Invasive Species Committees (ISCs) [www.hawaiiinvasivespecies.org/iscs/](http://www.hawaiiinvasivespecies.org/iscs/), Watershed Partnerships (WPs) [www.hawwp.org](http://www.hawwp.org), and the DLNR Natural Area Reserve System (NARS) and Forest Reserve (FR) programs <http://hawaii.gov/dlnr/dofaw> that took on and managed EEWF personnel in 2001 will experience a reduction of at least 50% in their State funding for Fiscal Year 2010.

These existing conservation management programs are supported by the Department of Land & Natural Resources' Natural Area Reserve Fund (NAR Fund). The NAR Fund is a special fund within the DLNR that receives 25% of State conveyance tax revenues. With the down economy and resulting decline in real estate transactions, conveyance tax revenues are severely diminished.

The ISCs and WPs will be laying off significant numbers of professional staff in FY10 and cutting back on the conservation services they provide for the benefit of all island residents. They will not likely be in a position to train and manage new personnel, particularly individuals who have no background in conservation field work. Highly skilled conservation workers would lose their jobs only to be replaced by unskilled labor that would not have sufficient mentoring, training or support to do good work.

Beyond ensuring a proper foundation for training and supervision, a lesson learned in 2001 with the EEWF is that the Legislature must provide reasonable funding for human resources support, safety equipment, tools, vehicles, and other necessities for Conservation Corps members.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide comments on this bill.

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