

SB 820

Testimony of The Nature Conservancy of Hawai'i
Commenting on S.B. 820 Relating to the Emergency Environmental Workforce
Senate Committee on Energy and Environment
Thursday, February 3, 2011, 3:00PM, Rm. 225

The Nature Conservancy provides the following comments on S.B. 820.

We recommend that if funding is available for an Emergency Environmental Workforce (EEWF) that a portion of that funding be used to shore up our existing environmental workforce— watershed partnerships and invasive species committees—to prevent job loss and ensure the foundation of support needed to make the EEWF an environmental and workforce development success. Beyond ensuring a proper foundation for training and supervision, a lesson learned in 2001 with the original EEWF is that the Legislature must provide reasonable funding for human resources support, safety equipment, tools, vehicles, and other necessities for workers and managers.

The 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 a renewed EEWF today.

The existing conservation programs that will likely be tapped to coordinate and supervise new EEWF workers are facing severe cutbacks. The Island Invasive Species Committees (ISCs) www.hawaiiinvasivespecies.org/iscs/, Watershed Partnerships (WPs) www.hawp.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 have experienced a reduction of 50-60% in their State funding in recent years.

These existing conservation management programs are supported by the DLNR's Natural Area Reserve Fund (NAR Fund). The NAR Fund is a special fund within the DLNR that currently receives 20% of State conveyance tax revenues. With the down economy and resulting decline in real estate transactions, conveyance tax revenues were severely diminished.

The ISCs and WPs have had to cut 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 may lose their jobs only to be replaced by unskilled labor that would not have sufficient mentoring, training or support to do good work.

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