

SB2511

Measure Title: RELATING TO WATERSHED PROTECTION.
Report Title: DLNR; Watershed Initiatives (\$)
Description: Establishes a watershed initiatives program in DLNR. Subjects program employees to the civil service laws. Appropriates funds for FY 2014-2015.
Companion: [HB2070](#)
Package: None
Current Referral: WTL, WAM
Introducer(s): DELA CRUZ

<u>Sort by Date</u>		Status Text
1/17/2014	S	Introduced.
1/21/2014	S	Passed First Reading.
1/21/2014	S	Referred to WTL, WAM.
1/30/2014	S	The committee(s) on WTL has scheduled a public hearing on 02-05-14 2:00PM in conference room 225.

NEIL ABERCROMBIE
GOVERNOR OF HAWAII



**STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES**

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**Testimony of
WILLIAM J. AILA, JR.
Chairperson**

**Before the Senate Committee on
WATER AND LAND**

**Wednesday, February 5, 2014
2:00 PM
State Capitol, Conference Room 225**

**In consideration of
SENATE BILL 2511
RELATING TO WATERSHED PROTECTION**

Senate Bill 2511 proposes to establish a watershed initiatives program in the Department of Land and Natural Resources (Department), subject program employees to the civil service laws, and appropriate funds for Fiscal Year 2014-2015. **The Department supports this bill provided that the funds appropriated do not adversely impact the Department's priorities in the Executive Budget or are derived from existing programmatic funding.**

The Department leverages funding and capacity by partnering with other land managers and agencies to protect priority watershed forests across county, state, federal, and private lands. This is made possible by supporting projects implemented by organizations such as the eleven statewide watershed partnerships and the invasive species committees that work across landowner boundaries. This model has provided the Department flexibility to most effectively afford landscape-level watershed protection, in addition to supporting projects implemented by civil service employees on state land.

Funding would support the Department's *The Rain Follows the Forest* watershed initiative (available online at <http://dlnr.hawaii.gov/rain>) to implement on-the-ground actions needed to stabilize Hawaii's water sources. The initiative seeks to double the acreage of protected watershed forests by 2021. Significant accomplishments are underway as funding provided for Fiscal Years 2013-2015 will support the protection of over 38,000 acres and management of more than 487,000 acres. Additionally, thousands of seedlings have been planted, largely by volunteers.

Forests are essential to provide water at affordable rates. Hawaii's native forests absorb moisture from rainfall and passing clouds that condense on the thick vegetation and can increase groundwater supply by up to 50%. However, over half of these forests have already been lost to invasive species, causing extensive water loss across landscapes. Clearly, our forests are

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enormous economic assets. Just as clearly, their degradation is ongoing and accelerating. The longer Hawai`i waits to take significant action to halt this destruction, the higher the costs will be to reverse the damage and ensure our future water supply for current and future generations. In addition to increasing fresh water supplies, the protection of forests prevents erosion that muddies beaches, coral reefs, and fisheries. Forests reduce Hawaii's greenhouse gas emissions, and mitigate many damaging impacts from climate change. Protection sustains the native plants and animals unique to our islands and sacred to the Hawaiian culture.

An appropriation to fund the watershed initiative is a responsible measure to provide immediate action to ensure wide-ranging benefits essential to Hawaii's environmental and economic health for current and future generations.

Testimony of The Nature Conservancy of Hawai'i
Commenting with Proposed Amendments on S.B. 2511 Relating to Watershed Protection
Senate Committee on Water and Land
Wednesday, February 5, 2014, 2:00PM, Room 225

The Nature Conservancy of Hawai'i is a private non-profit conservation organization dedicated to the preservation of the lands and waters upon which life in these islands depends. The Conservancy has helped to protect nearly 200,000 acres of natural lands in Hawai'i. Today, we actively manage more than 35,000 acres in 11 nature preserves on 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.

The Nature Conservancy submits the following comments on S.B. 2511 and suggests an amendment.

Healthy Hawaiian forests that are not overrun by invasive species act like a sponge, collecting rain and moisture from passing clouds, slowly delivering fresh water into streams and aquifers, absorbing greenhouse gases, and reducing runoff and siltation into near shore waters during storm events. Science indicates that one of the very likely effects of climate change in Hawai'i will be more severe storm events but overall less rainfall. One of the most effective tools we have to help address these effects of climate change is to maintain the health and natural function of our forests.

The Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR) already has a well-established watershed protection program. This program involves its own direct, on the ground management work as well as working in partnership with other public and private land owners and land managers. We agree with specifically incorporating this activity into the DLNR's authorizing statute.

We are, however, concerned that this bill may unduly restrict the DLNR from implementing this program only through the use of State civil service personnel. A primary reason the DLNR's watershed protection program is so effective is that it has a strong partnership component. While it carries out a large amount of very effective work with its own civil service personnel, the Department cannot reasonably, efficiently or cost-effectively take on all this responsibility itself. The Department's Watershed Partnership, Forest Stewardship and Natural Area Partnership Programs are prime examples of how the DLNR has effectively leverages watershed management goals across state, county, federal and private lands, taking advantage of many millions of dollars of non-state funds and work by non-state personnel.

We recommend the following amendment to Section 1 of the bill:

"§183- Watershed initiatives program; established. There shall be established within the department a watershed initiatives program, which shall plan, monitor, and execute watershed protection initiatives. The board of land and natural resources may shall employ necessary staff, including professional, administrative, and clerical employees to execute the program; provided that the employees shall be subject to chapter 76."

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