

JAN 27 2016

A BILL FOR AN ACT

MAKING AN APPROPRIATION TO THE HAWAII ASSOCIATION OF
CONSERVATION DISTRICTS.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF HAWAII:

1 SECTION 1. The legislature finds that the Hawaii
2 association of conservation districts, through coordination,
3 facilitation, and partnerships, assists government agencies in
4 identifying and implementing culturally-sensitive projects and
5 practices to ensure the protection of Hawaii's environment. The
6 Hawaii association of conservation districts comprises sixteen
7 districts representing every community on all major islands of
8 Hawaii. Chapter 180, Hawaii Revised Statutes, authorizes the
9 soil and water conservation districts to operate as government
10 subdivisions to educate the public and construct and maintain
11 conservation projects and programs in Hawaii. Each of the
12 sixteen districts is governed by five volunteer directors and is
13 supported by staff. The department of land and natural
14 resources provides administration and maintains oversight
15 authority of the soil and water conservation districts.



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1 The soil and water conservation districts have worked to
2 improve Hawaii's environment and economy through major projects
3 over the past sixty years. While these projects do not occur in
4 all districts every year, collaborative efforts with partners
5 and government agencies have brought millions of dollars to
6 Hawaii to improve farm practices, reduce erosion, improve ocean
7 and drinking water quality, fight invasive species, improve
8 public safety, protect property, conserve water, and strengthen
9 the economy. The soil and water conservation districts also
10 provide educational and community support for conservation
11 awareness. The districts participate in resource conservation
12 and development projects and statewide high school programs.
13 The districts also introduce conservation principles in
14 elementary schools.

15 In addition, the soil and water conservation districts
16 assist with reviewing each county's grading permits and
17 conservation plans. County grading permit reviews and
18 conservation plans are critical to preserve the environment,
19 stimulate the economy, and maintain individual livelihoods. The
20 demand and accompanying workload for this service have increased
21 dramatically with population growth and land use changes. The



1 districts receive hundreds of requests for conservation plans
2 and county grading permit reviews each year. As a result,
3 districts are currently struggling to keep pace with the demand.

4 The department of health recently notified the Hawaii
5 Association of Conservation Districts that the current oil
6 pollution funding would end on December 31, 2013, and a new
7 potential, but not guaranteed, funding mechanism will utilize
8 funds provided by the Federal Water Pollution Control Act, title
9 33 United States Code section 1329, also known as the Clean
10 Water Act, for the program, thus limiting services to those
11 entities within priority watershed areas that have approved
12 watershed plans. This is problematic as many of Hawaii's
13 farming areas are not within priority watersheds. On Maui, for
14 example, the breadbasket of Omaopio and Pulehu, including the
15 county agricultural park and the expanding Haiku flower
16 production district, exists outside of these areas. Therefore,
17 a priority of the relevant soil and water conservation district
18 is the identification of solutions that provide continued
19 delivery of services to all farmers and ranchers.

20 The legislature also finds that the current funding
21 mechanism proposed by the department of health will result in



1 delays within the Maui county department of public works for
2 farm-level grubbing and grading permits. County funding
3 currently addresses review and recommendations associated with
4 non-farm plans. The existing department of health-funded soil
5 and water conservation district program covered all conservation
6 plan requirements on agricultural lands. However, as proposed,
7 the new department of health process will exclude many farms,
8 causing them to fall under the county grubbing and grading
9 permit process. Even as these farmers are referred to the soil
10 and water conservation district by the county of Maui department
11 of public works, there will be no one to assist them.

12 The county of Maui department of planning often requests
13 landowners to obtain farm plans. These plans are prepared by
14 the conservation specialist. This service would no longer be
15 available. Additionally, the department of health has requested
16 that the conservation specialist take a more active role in the
17 enforcement of conservation plan provisions. The soil and water
18 conservation districts have not assumed this role, because
19 advocacy and enforcement by the same entity may cause conflicts,
20 and, more importantly, result in a reluctance by farmers and
21 ranchers to participate in conservation programs.



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1 Finally, the legislature finds that agriculture in Hawaii
 2 is rapidly evolving. Many new farmers are immigrants who
 3 frequently are unfamiliar with the laws of the United States.
 4 Educational assistance, including education about conservation
 5 measures, will be important to ensure that these new farmers and
 6 ranchers adopt good environmental stewardship as a core value
 7 while seeking economic viability.

8 The purpose of this Act is to appropriate moneys to the
 9 Hawaii association of conservation districts to assist with its
 10 staffing and operating costs while providing time for the
 11 districts to develop sustainable funding mechanisms.

12 SECTION 2. There is appropriated out of the general
 13 revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$ or so much
 14 thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2016-2017 for
 15 staffing and operating costs of the Hawaii association of
 16 conservation districts.

17 The sum appropriated shall be expended by the department of
 18 land and natural resources for the purposes of this Act.

19 SECTION 3. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 2016.

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INTRODUCED BY:

Rossly H Baker

[Signature]

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Report Title:

Hawaii Association of Conservation Districts; Appropriation

Description:

Appropriates moneys for the Hawaii Association of Conservation Districts to assist with its staffing and operating costs.

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