

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR | KE KIA'ĀINA

SYLVIA LUKE
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR | KA HOPE KIA'ĀINA



STATE OF HAWAII | KA MOKU'ĀINA 'O HAWAII'
DEPARTMENT OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES
KA 'OIHANA KUMUWAIWAI 'ĀINA

P.O. BOX 621
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96809

DAWN N.S. CHANG
CHAIRPERSON
BOARD OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES
COMMISSION ON WATER RESOURCE
MANAGEMENT

RYAN K.P. KANAKA'OLE
FIRST DEPUTY

DEAN D. UYENO
ACTING DEPUTY DIRECTOR - WATER

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LAND
STATE PARKS

Testimony of
DAWN N. S. CHANG
Chairperson

Before the House Committee on
WATER & LAND

Tuesday, March 19, 2024
9:30 AM

State Capitol, Conference Room 430 and Via Videoconference

In consideration of
HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION 19/HOUSE RESOLUTION 9
URGING THE DEPARTMENT OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES TO
IMPLEMENT NATIVE PLANT SEEDING PROJECTS IN MILILANI MAUKA TO
RESTORE THE ECOLOGICAL DAMAGE FROM THE NOVEMBER WILDFIRES

House Concurrent Resolution 19/ House Resolution 9 urging the Department of Land and Natural Resources to implement native plant seeding projects in Mililani Mauka to restore the ecological damage from the November wildfires. **The Department of Land and Natural Resources (Department) supports these measures.**

The wildfires of November 2023 have left a scar on Mililani Mauka, damaging 2.5 square miles of critical ecosystem, including parts of the Oahu Forest National Wildlife Refuge and the Ko'olau Mountains. This area, home to a native forest of koa trees, uluhe ferns, and twenty-two federally designated endangered or threatened species, is now at risk of being overtaken by invasive species. The rapid reoccupation of these lands by non-native, highly flammable grasses and shrubs post-wildfire poses a significant threat to the native ecosystem and increases the risk of future wildfires.

Implementing native plant seeding projects is a proactive measure that addresses the urgent need for ecological restoration and wildfire risk mitigation. Native Hawaiian plants are a cornerstone of the state's unique biodiversity and possess inherent qualities that make them well-suited for the restoration of fire-damaged ecosystems. Many native species are drought-tolerant, require less maintenance, and, most importantly, are less flammable than the non-native grasses and shrubs that currently threaten to dominate the post-wildfire landscape.

Seeding native plants in restoration efforts enhances the ecosystem's resilience against future wildfires, supports the recovery of endangered and threatened species by providing them with their natural habitat, and preserves the biodiversity that is crucial for maintaining ecological balance.

Furthermore, this initiative serves as an educational and cultural opportunity. It underscores the importance of native species and traditional ecological knowledge in contemporary environmental management and conservation efforts. Engaging the community in these restoration projects can foster a deeper connection to the land and promote stewardship and sustainable practices harmonizing with Hawai'i's cultural heritage.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of these measures.