



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

Legislative Testimony

Hō'ike Mana'o I Mua O Ka 'Aha'ōlelo

Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Finance
Thursday, March 28, 2024 at 3:30 p.m.

By

Brennon Morioka, Dean
College of Engineering

And

Michael Bruno, Provost
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SB 2502 SD2 HD1 – RELATING TO THE GENERATION OF WILDFIRE SUSCEPTIBILITY MAPS FOR HAWAII

Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Kitagawa, and Members of the Finance Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 2502 SD2 HD1, provided its adoption does not impact priorities as indicated in our Board of Regents Approved Budget. This measure establishes and appropriates funds for the University of Hawai'i to develop wildfire susceptibility and vulnerability maps for the State of Hawai'i.

These maps 1) help identify areas that are more susceptible to wildfire hazard, 2) allow decision-makers to prioritize high-risk areas for targeted risk reduction strategies, and 3) assist in the development of adaptation policies that lessen the disastrous impacts of future wildfires. Decision-makers can use wildfire vulnerability maps to guide zoning regulations to reduce the impact of wildfires on communities. Moreover, authorities will be more informed about policies allowing construction in vulnerable areas and locating essential facilities (e.g., hospitals, schools, and firefighting stations) in areas that are less vulnerable to wildfires.

In collaboration with the National Weather Service, the Hawai'i Department of Land and Natural Resources-Division of Forestry and Wildlife, Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency, and county fire departments, the results of this project will be used to develop the best mitigation strategies such as ecological forest management (fuel reduction to restore to natural conditions), creation of defensible space (using native and/or fire-resistant vegetation), and development of greenbelts (diverse vegetation including trees, shrubs, grasses and wildflowers, that act as natural buffers to create separation from wildlands) in each county to reduce the impacts of wildfires.

The UH Mānoa (UHM) College of Engineering and UHM Water Resources Research Center's research capabilities, combined with the extensive outreach activities and technical solutions from the UHM College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources, will provide the full range of skillsets and research, as well as the climate data necessary to develop this important tool for Hawai'i's decision-makers.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.



TESTIMONY FROM THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF HAWAII

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

MARCH 28, 2024

SB2502 SD2 HD1 – RELATING TO THE GENERATION OF WILDFIRE SUSCEPTIBILITY MAPS FOR HAWAII.

POSITION: SUPPORT

The Democratic Party of Hawai'i **supports** SB2502 SD2 HD1, relating to the generation of wildfire susceptibility maps for Hawai'i. Pursuant to the "Public Safety and Disaster and Emergency Preparedness" section of the Democratic Party of Hawai'i platform, the party supports "policy that protects the people of Hawai'i and their property against natural and man-made disasters," and "believes that climate change is real, affirms human activity as its primary cause and main driver, and supports emergency preparedness and planning efforts to mitigate its impacts."

Last year, we witnessed the impact of the climate emergency on our shores. On August 8, 2023, wildfires swept across Maui and killed at least 100 people, making it one of the nation's deadliest natural disasters. The spread of the fires has been attributed to climate change conditions, such as unusually dry landscapes and the confluence of a strong high-pressure system to the north and Hurricane Dora to the south.

The wildfires destroyed over 2,200 structures, including numerous residential buildings, historic landmarks, and school facilities. In September

2023, a report from the United States Department of Commerce estimated the total economic damage of the wildfires to be roughly \$5.5 billion. According to a report issued by the University of Hawaii Economic Research Organization on September 22, 2023, the unemployment rate on Maui was expected to soar above 11 percent by the end of 2023 and remain above 4 percent through 2026. A total of 10,448 new claims for unemployment in Maui County were filed in the four weeks following the wildfires, about 9,900 more than the preceding four weeks. Displaced families and workers who lost their jobs are still attempting to recover from the disaster, with a full recovery expected to take many years to achieve.

Accordingly, we must do all we can to prevent tragedies like this from occurring again on our shores, including by investing in this two year program that will generate web-GIS wildfire susceptibility and vulnerability maps for the State of Hawaii to determine which communities, landscapes, buildings, and infrastructure are most vulnerable to future wildfires. The Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency released an updated State Hazard Mitigation Plan last November, in which the state's wildfire risk level soared 74 percent to 6.6 from its previous level of 3.8 in the 2018 draft of the report.

The updated hazard mitigation plan contains statistics on how many people by county are at risk from wildfire hazards. For Honolulu, 427,293 people could potentially be affected by wildfires, which was listed as the highest risk with a risk factor of 5.7. Maui County also has wildfires as its highest emergency risk with a score of 5.8 and 81,424 people at risk. On Kaua'i, wildfires carry a 5.6 risk level and threaten 27,604 people. Hawai'i Island has a wildfire risk score of 4.6 and 32,080 people at risk.

Wildfires are now designated as the top hazard in the state according to the updated HIEMA report. It is incumbent upon policymakers to respond with urgency to keep our communities safe.

Mahalo nui loa,

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MAUI

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

VOICE OF BUSINESS

HEARING BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE
HAWAII STATE CAPITOL, HOUSE CONFERENCE ROOM 308
Thursday, March 28, 2024 AT 3:30 P.M.

To The Honorable Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair
The Honorable Lisa Kitagawa, Vice Chair
Members of the Committee on Finance

**COMMENTS on SB2502 SD2 HD1 RELATING TO THE GENERATION OF WILDFIRE
SUSCEPTIBILITY MAPS FOR HAWAII**

The Maui Chamber of Commerce would like to **COMMENT on SB2502 SD2 HD1.**

The Chamber supports and appreciates the University of Hawaii doing this project as it builds capacity and workforce in our state. However, we feel that the state should also explore private partners, who may be best skilled with previous experience and/or create university/private partnerships to accomplish this goal.

We would like to suggest that this effort and the effort in SB2284 (relating to a wildfire forecast system for Hawaii) be combined.

Mahalo for the opportunity to offer **COMMENTS on SB2502 SD2 HD1.**

Sincerely,

Pamela Tumpap
President

To advance and promote a healthy economic environment for business, advocating for a responsive government and quality education, while preserving Maui's unique community characteristics.



Hawai'i Forest Industry Association

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Date: 03/27/24

TO: FIN Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Kitagawa, and FIN Committee Members Aiu, Chun, Cochran, Takuya Garrett, Kahaloa, Kila, Kobayashi, Lamosao, Morikawa, Nishimoto, Poepoe, Takenouchi, Alcos, Ward

FROM: Hawai'i Forest Industry Association (HFIA)

SUBJECT: Testimony in Support of SB2502 SD2 HD1 Relating to the Generation of Wildfire Susceptibility Maps for Hawaii

Dear Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Kitagawa and FIN Committee Members,

On behalf of the Directors and members of the Hawai'i Forest Industry Association (HFIA), please support SB2502 SD2 HD1 Relating to the Generation of Wildfire Susceptibility Maps for Hawaii.

The HFIA believes that while addressing the actionable root(s) of the issue regarding wildfires (via vegetation management, improvement of soil health, installation and maintenance of fire breaks, etc.) is needed in the immediate future and ongoing over the long term, preparing for wildfires in ways such as that outlined in SB2502 SD2 HD1 are also important and need to be acted upon. Creating maps to identify which communities, landscapes, buildings, and infrastructure are most vulnerable to future wildfires will allow us to most optimally put our resources toward protecting and mitigating fire in those areas first while we build the capacity to apply mitigation and preparedness techniques and efforts more robustly across the State.

We hope that you will support SB2502 SD2 HD1.

Mahalo for your time and consideration,

Guy Cellier, President
Hawai'i Forest Industry Association

HFIA's mission is to promote healthy and productive forests and a sustainable forest industry through management, education, planning, information exchange, and advocacy. HFIA has over 130 members including woodworkers, landowners, sawyers, foundations, foresters, growers, educators, environmentalists, architects, millers, ranchers, and others interested in HFIA's mission and goals.

HFIA Board of Directors

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