



# 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 Water & Land  
Tuesday, March 12, 2024 at 9:00 a.m.

By

Brennon Morioka, Dean  
College of Engineering

And

Michael Bruno, Provost  
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

### SB 2502 SD2 – RELATING TO THE GENERATION OF WILDFIRE SUSCEPTIBILITY MAPS FOR HAWAII

Chair Ichiyama, Vice Chair Poepoe, and members of the Water & Land Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 2502 SD2, 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 Hawaii's decision-makers.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.



**Hawai'i Forest Industry Association**

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**Date:** 02/19/24

**TO:** WAL Chair Ichiyama, Vice Chair Poepoe and WAL Committee Members Chun, Ganaden, Hashem, Mizuno, Morikawa, Takayama, Souza

**FROM:** Hawai'i Forest Industry Association (HFIA)

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

Dear Chair Ichiyama, Vice Chair Poepoe and WAL Committee Members,

On behalf of the Directors and members of the Hawai'i Forest Industry Association (HFIA), please support SB2502 SD2 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 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.

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**

Officers: President Guy Cellier, Vice President Irene Sprecher, Secretary Taylor Coons, Treasurer Wade Lee  
Directors: Jeremy Campbell, Aaron Hammer, Nicholas Koch, Michael Sowards, Aileen Yeh



## **TESTIMONY FROM THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF HAWAII**

### **SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION**

**MARCH 12, 2024**

### **SB2502SD2 – RELATING TO THE GENERATION OF WILDFIRE SUSCEPTIBILITY MAPS FOR HAWAII.**

#### **POSITION: SUPPORT**

The Democratic Party of Hawaii **supports** SB2502 SD2, relating to the generation of wildfire susceptibility maps for Hawaii. Pursuant to the “Public Safety and Disaster and Emergency Preparedness” section of the Democratic Party of Hawaii platform, the party supports “policy that protects the people of Hawaii 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,

**Kris Coffield**  
*Co-Chair, Legislative Committee*  
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*Co-Chair, Legislative Committee*  
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Testimony of **Lahaina Strong**  
Before the House Committee on  
**Water and Land**

In Consideration of Senate Bill No. SB2502 SD2  
**RELATING TO THE GENERATION OF WILDFIRE SUSCEPTIBILITY MAPS FOR  
HAWAII**

To Chair Ichiyama, Vice Chair Poepoe and the honorable members of the committee,

We are writing on behalf of Lahaina Strong, an organization that was initially formed in 2018 following the Hurricane Lane fire in Lahaina and re-energized last year after the devastating Lahaina fires on August 8. Lahaina Strong has been at the forefront of relief and advocacy efforts, including initiating the "Fishing for Housing" camp, which has been in operation for over 17 weeks along Kaanapali Beach, highlighting the need for dignified housing for Lahaina fire victims. Our organization is the largest grassroots, Lahaina-based community organization, with over 20,000 supporters, engaged in emphasizing the importance of local voices and community-driven solutions.

**Lahaina Strong stands in support of SB2502 SD2** for the establishment and implementation of a 2-year program to develop web-GIS wildfire susceptibility and vulnerability maps for the state. While we recognize the importance of this initiative in identifying areas at risk and informing strategic planning, we also urge for broader actions that extend beyond mapping alone.

Indeed, the creation of these maps serves as a crucial first step in our collective efforts to address the growing threat of wildfires. However, we must prioritize the implementation of comprehensive fuel management strategies to mitigate the risk posed by combustible vegetation and ensure the resilience of our ecosystems and communities.

Moreover, we must hold large landowners accountable for their role in wildfire prevention and management. They possess significant influence over vast expanses of land, and their stewardship practices profoundly impact wildfire dynamics. By establishing clear regulations and incentives for responsible land and fuel management practices, we can foster a culture of proactive wildfire prevention and minimize the potential for catastrophic events.

While the appropriation of funds outlined in this legislation is a critical step towards enhancing our state's preparedness and resilience, it is equally vital that we allocate resources towards on-the-ground actions that address the root causes of wildfires. We must move the conversation broader to actual implementation.

**Lahaina Strong supports SB2502 SD2** to create wildfire susceptibility maps. We should seize this opportunity to not just use the maps as an endpoint in itself, but further create and implement tangible measures that protect our communities, preserve our natural resources, and uphold our collective responsibility to steward this land for future generations.

Mahalo for your attention and commitment to the well-being of our community.

Sincerely,

Jordan Ruidas, Courtney Lazo, Pa'ele Kiakona

Lahaina Strong





# MAUI

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

VOICE OF BUSINESS

**HEARING BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON WATER & LAND  
HAWAII STATE CAPITOL, HOUSE CONFERENCE ROOM 430  
Tuesday, March 12, 2024 AT 9:00 A.M.**

To The Honorable Linda Ichiyama, Chair  
The Honorable Mahina Poepoe, Vice Chair  
Members of the Committee on Water & Land

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

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

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.**

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.

**SB-2502-SD-2**

Submitted on: 3/9/2024 2:01:06 PM

Testimony for WAL on 3/12/2024 9:00:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Jacqueline S. Ambrose	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

Yes to requiring the University of Hawaii to establish and implement a 2-year program to develop web-GIS wildfire susceptibility and vulnerability maps for the State to determine which communities, landscapes, buildings, and infrastructure are most vulnerable to future wildfires.

Makes an appropriation. Declares that the appropriation exceeds the state general fund expenditure ceiling for 2024-2025

**SB-2502-SD-2**

Submitted on: 3/10/2024 9:20:49 PM

Testimony for WAL on 3/12/2024 9:00:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Tamara Paltin	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I am testifying in strong support of SB2502. Having lived through the wildfires in West Maui 8/8/23 prevention is much less expensive and traumatic than preparation and knowledge. Generally speaking, we know areas that are susceptible but it needs to be known throughout every level of government and the public sector with plans to address the areas that are most susceptible. Please do not hesitate or the next community affected could be yours.

Mahalo for your commitment and service to our communities,

Tamara Paltin

**SB-2502-SD-2**

Submitted on: 3/11/2024 9:50:33 AM

Testimony for WAL on 3/12/2024 9:00:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Riley Bond	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Chair and Members of the Committee,

I am writing to express my strong support for SB2502 SD2, which aims to establish and implement a two-year program to generate web-GIS wildfire susceptibility and vulnerability maps for the State of Hawaii. As a mother and community organizer who has witnessed the devastating effects of the Lahaina fires firsthand, I believe these bills are critically important for the safety and well-being of our communities.

Wildfires pose a significant threat to our state, not only in terms of property damage but also in terms of human lives and environmental impact. The establishment of wildfire susceptibility maps will provide invaluable information to help identify which communities, landscapes, buildings, and infrastructure are most vulnerable to future wildfires. This knowledge is essential for effective planning, preparedness, and risk mitigation efforts.

By investing in the development of wildfire susceptibility maps through SB2502 SD2, we can better equip our communities, emergency responders, and policymakers with the tools and information needed to mitigate risks, protect lives, and safeguard our natural resources. By doing so, we can take proactive steps to enhance public safety, reduce the impact of wildfires, and protect the well-being of our communities for generations to come.

Mahalo for considering my testimony.

Sincerely,

Riley Bond

**SB-2502-SD-2**

Submitted on: 3/12/2024 7:01:40 AM

Testimony for WAL on 3/12/2024 9:00:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Jackie Keefe	Individual	Comments	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Ichiyama, Vice Chair Poepoe, and Members of the Committee on Water and Land,

My name is Jackie Keefe and I am a resident of Lahaina.

I am thrilled to see that there are multiple wildfire prevention bills making their way through the state legislature, as the issue of wildfire prevention will only get more significant in coming years.

I wanted to provide comments about this bill because while I support the idea of establishing a more scientific approach to understanding our vulnerabilities, I wanted to caution about which technologies we use.

Lt. George Purdy of Lana'i Airport's Fire Team presented to the House Working Group on Wildfire Prevention back in November, and I would urge folks to go back and look at it again. GIS technology is not the most advanced that we could be using, and I would urge folks to consider using drone LiDAR. If the University of Hawai'i is not yet using this technology, his company "Drone Services Hawai'i" is. There are classes at UH for drone programs, and it is important that we do not begin this process with outdated technology. LiDAR GIS technology is cheaper, more accurate, and more efficient than ground survey work.

Thank you for your consideration.

Jackie Keefe