

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

SYLVIA LUKE
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR | KA HOPE KIA'ĀINA



STATE OF HAWAII | KA MOKU'ĀINA 'O HAWAI'I
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

CIARA W.K. KAHANE
DEPUTY DIRECTOR - WATER

AQUATIC RESOURCES
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ENFORCEMENT
ENGINEERING
FORESTRY AND WILDLIFE
HISTORIC PRESERVATION
KAHOOLAWE ISLAND RESERVE COMMISSION
LAND
STATE PARKS

Testimony of
DAWN N. S. CHANG
Chairperson

Before the House Committee on
GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS

Tuesday, March 25, 2025
9:40 AM

State Capitol, Conference Room 411 and Via Videoconference

In consideration of
HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION 40
HOUSE RESOLUTION 35
URGING THE DEPARTMENT OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES AND OTHER
STATE AGENCIES TO WORK WITH COMMITTED COMMUNITY GROUPS TO
CO-STEWARD COMMUNITY FORESTS LOCATED ON PUBLIC LANDS FOR
THE BETTERMENT OF THE STATE'S FORESTS AND COMMUNITIES.

House Concurrent Resolution 40 and House Resolution 35 urge the Department of Land and Natural Resources (Department) and other state agencies to work with committed community groups to co-steward community forests located on public lands for the betterment of the State's forests and communities. **The Department strongly supports this resolution and offers comments.**

The Department highly values the principle of co-stewardship and recognizes the vital role that community involvement plays in effective forest management. With over 700,000 acres of forest reserves under our care—along with other public lands that serve as community forests—we understand the critical role of community collaboration in sustaining these important biocultural ecosystems. Community forests include, but are not limited to, our Forest Reserves; they are forests where people live, work, learn, and connect with the natural world. Community forests are vital for environmental resilience, cultural perpetuation, public health, food sovereignty, and economic vitality.

The resolution aligns closely with the mission of the Division of Forestry and Wildlife (DOFAW) to responsibly manage and protect Hawai'i's natural and cultural resources. Community forests support

native biodiversity and provide essential ecosystem services such as clean water, the sequestration of carbon, the reduction of erosion, and the generation of food and medicines. Moreover, they play a key role in honoring and providing opportunities for traditional and customary Native Hawaiian practices and promoting aloha ‘āina.

DOFAW has a long history of working in partnership with communities, nonprofit organizations, and other agencies through the branches in each county and through statewide programs such as the Kaulunani Urban and Community Forestry Program, the Forest Stewardship Program, Watershed Partnerships, and the Nā Ala Hele Trails and Access Program. These partnerships have shown that when local communities actively engage in stewardship, the land benefits, and communities become more deeply connected and resilient.

As Hawai‘i observes **2025 as the Year of Our Community Forests**, this resolution is timely and meaningful. It reinforces our collective responsibility to invest in and support the stewards who care for our forests. DOFAW stands ready to continue and to expand our collaborative work with dedicated community groups who share in our commitment to healthy forests and thriving communities.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of this resolution.



Environmental Caucus of The Democratic Party of Hawai'i

March 23, 2025

Testimony in Support of HR35/HCR40 – Co-steward Community Forests on Public Lands

To: Chair Mark J. Hashem, Vice Chair Rachele F. Lamasao, and Members of the Committee on Water & Land

Date: Tuesday, March 25, 2025 **Time:** 9:40 a.m.

Place: Conference Room 411 & Videoconference

Aloha Chair Hashem, Vice Chair Lamasao, and Members of the Committee:

The Environmental Caucus of the Democratic Party of Hawaii submits this testimony in strong support of HR35/HCR40, which urges the Department of Land and Natural Resources and other state agencies to work with committed community groups to co-steward community forests located on public lands for the betterment of the state's forests and communities.

Key Points in Support:

- Co-stewardship fosters collaboration between state agencies and local groups, ensuring management practices are informed by community knowledge and priorities.
- Engaging community groups in forest stewardship enhances biodiversity and strengthens Hawaii's ecosystems against climate change impacts.
- Community involvement builds a sense of ownership and responsibility, leading to better protection of vital natural resources.
- Co-stewardship aligns with the mission of the Environmental Caucus to promote environmental conservation and community well-being.
- Advancing HR35/HCR40 reflects Hawaii's commitment to inclusive and innovative approaches to resource management.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

Sincerely,

Melodie Aduja and Alan Burdick

Co-chairs, Environmental Caucus of the Democratic Party of Hawaii



March 24 2025

To: Chair Mark Hashem, Vice Chair Rachele Lamosao, and the House Committee on Water and Land.

Subject: **HR35 and HCR 40**, URGING THE DEPARTMENT OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES AND OTHER STATE AGENCIES TO WORK WITH COMMITTED COMMUNITY GROUPS TO CO-STEWARD COMMUNITY FORESTS LOCATED ON PUBLIC LANDS FOR THE BETTERMENT OF THE STATE'S FORESTS AND COMMUNITIES.

Aloha,

I am submitting this testimony in strong support of the resolutions urging state agencies to collaborate with committed community groups in the co-stewardship of forests on public lands. This initiative is essential to the long-term health of forests, ecosystems, and communities.

Recognizing the significance of these natural spaces, the upcoming year has been designated as a time to highlight and prioritize their protection. The mission of those responsible for managing public lands aligns with this effort, ensuring that natural, cultural, and historical resources are preserved for both present and future generations. Community forests, where people live, learn, work, and gather, are a critical part of this mission. Traditional practices deeply connect people to the land, reinforcing the need to care for and sustain these spaces. Across public lands, including vast forest reserves, parks, school grounds, and other green areas, maintaining these forests requires ongoing expertise, resources, and dedication, often provided by local communities with a strong connection to the land. To ensure these spaces thrive, strong partnerships between agencies and communities are essential. Co-stewardship promotes shared responsibility, strengthens conservation efforts, and acknowledges the invaluable role of local engagement. By working together, forests and the well-being of those who depend on them will be safeguarded for generations to come.

I urge full support for these resolutions and encourage meaningful collaboration between agencies and communities to protect and sustain these vital forests.

Mahalo,

Lea iaea & The Food Plus Policy Team

#fixourfoodsystem

The Food+ Policy internship develops student advocates who learn work skills while increasing civic engagement to become emerging leaders. We focus on good food systems policy because we see the importance and potential of the food system in combating climate change and increasing the health, equity, and resiliency of Hawai'i communities.

In 2025, the cohort of interns are undergraduate and graduate students and young professionals working in the food system. They are a mix of traditional and nontraditional students, including parents and veterans, who have backgrounds in education, farming, public health, nutrition, and Hawaiian culture.



House Committee on Water & Land

Testimony on HCR40 / HR35

Relating to Community Forests

March 25th, 2025

9:40 AM

Room 411

The Climate Change and Health Working Group (CCHWG) is a cross-sector collaborative interested in strengthening climate and health resiliency in Hawai'i. CCHWG supports this resolution, which urges the Department of Land and Natural Resources, and other state agencies, to work with community groups to co-steward community forests located on public lands.

Testimony of the Hawai'i Climate Change and Health Working Group

In Support of HCR40 & HR35 Relating to Energy Assistance

Aloha Chair Hashem, Vice Chair Lamosao, and Members of the House Committee on Water & Land,

The Climate Change and Health Working Group (CCHWG) strongly supports this resolution urging the Department of Land and Natural Resources and other state agencies to collaborate with committed community groups to co-steward community forests on public lands. The Year of Our Community Forests is an opportune time to advance inclusive, community-driven forest management that provides immense benefits to Hawai'i's natural environment and public health.

As a cross-sector coalition of public health, environmental, and community advocates, CCHWG recognizes that healthy forests play a vital role in mitigating the impacts of climate change. Forests store carbon, improve air and water quality, support native species, and reduce the urban heat island effect. Moreover, well-maintained tree canopies can lessen rates of respiratory

disease, lower stress, and promote mental well-being. Expanding equitable access to these resources strengthens our capacity to adapt to climate-driven challenges like rising temperatures, drought, and wildfire risks.

Community co-management also addresses critical health determinants. Healthy, well-managed forests can protect watersheds, reduce erosion, enhance food and medicinal plant access, and offer shade and recreational opportunities that nurture both physical and mental well-being. Active community involvement deepens this connection, creating a shared sense of responsibility that ensures sustainable forest practices and expands the public's appreciation for the diverse ways trees enrich our lives.

For these reasons, the Climate Change and Health Working Group respectfully urges the Legislature to adopt this resolution. By supporting collaborative forest stewardship, Hawai'i can build stronger, healthier communities, protect our shared natural resources, and enhance our collective resilience to climate change.

Sincerely,

The Climate Change & Health Working Group



Testimony Before The
House Committee on Water & Land (WAL)
IN SUPPORT OF HR35 AND HCR40
March 25, 2025, 9:40 a.m., Room 411 via Videoconference

We are Olan Leimomi Fisher and Alex Connelly, Kua'āina Advocate and E Alu Pū Coordinator, respectively, testifying on behalf of [Kua'āina Ulu 'Auamo \(or KUA\)](#). "Kua'āina Ulu 'Auamo" stands for "grassroots growing through shared responsibility," and our acronym "KUA" means "backbone." **Our mission is to connect and empower communities to improve their quality of life through the collective care for their biocultural (natural and cultural) heritage, serving as a "backbone organization" that supports creative and community-driven solutions to problems stemming from environmental degradation.** Hawai'i's biocultural resources continue to be negatively impacted by political, economic, and social changes, and the increasing dangers of climate change make fostering and empowering resilient communities acutely critical.

Currently KUA supports three major networks of: (1) over 40 mālama 'āina (caring for our 'āina or "that which feeds") community groups collectively referred to as E Alu Pū (moving forward together); (2) over 60 loko i'a (fishpond aquaculture systems unique to Hawai'i) and wai 'ōpae (anchialine pool systems) sites in varying stages of restoration and development, with numerous caretakers, stakeholders, and volunteers known as the Hui Mālama Loko i'a ("caretakers of fishponds"); and (3) the Limu Hui made up of over 50 loea (traditional experts) and practitioners in all things "limu" or locally-grown "seaweed." **Our shared vision is to once again experience what our kūpuna (ancestors) referred to as 'ĀINA MOMONA – abundant and healthy ecological systems that sustain our community resilience and well-being.**

**KUA strongly supports HR35 and companion HCR40
as incremental steps toward 'āina momona.**

These measures work in conjunction with 2025 being the Year of Our Community Forests, urging the Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR) and other state agencies to work with committed community groups to co-steward public community forests for the betterment of the state's forests and communities. **Community ulu lā'au (forests) are intended for the people of Hawai'i to love and learn from, including places where Native Hawaiians are able to practice and maintain their constitutionally protected traditional and customary ways of life.** Kumulā'au (trees or sources of medicine) provide numerous health benefits to all people, including not only as food, but also medicinal, spiritual, and other cultural practices like wa'a (canoe) and structural (hale) building, hula, carving, kapa making, weaving, etc. To Native Hawaiians and locals alike, kumulā'au are treasured sources of life, often seen as sources of strength and places of refuge for their resources and shelter, and likened to strong and steadfast kūpuna (ancestors) that can withstand any hardship.

The communities we work with are committed to ensuring the long-term health of our biocultural resources that they have cared for and depended on for generations since time immemorial. **We believe our environment, the foundation of our very existence and “that which feeds” us all, requires long-term investment through a shared vision of achieving ‘āina momona (abundance) once again.** To get there requires dedicating more resources for mālama ‘āina (caring for our environment), including through these resolutions to cultivate existing community co-stewardship relationships, and pave the way for more, recognizing and honoring the importance of community investments in caring for our shared biocultural resources like ulu lā‘au. Our decisions today will continue to shape the future that our keiki’s keiki’s keiki will one day inherit – we hope for a future of shared and harmonious abundance, and hope you do, too.

Mahalo nui loa for this opportunity to submit testimony. Please **PASS** HR35 and HCR40.

Aloha ‘Āina Momona no nā kau ā kau.

HR-35

Submitted on: 3/23/2025 2:13:57 PM

Testimony for WAL on 3/25/2025 9:40:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Dylan P. Armstrong	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Mahalo for considering this timely and thoughtful measure.

HR-35

Submitted on: 3/24/2025 6:25:35 AM

Testimony for WAL on 3/25/2025 9:40:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Keoni Shizuma	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Committee members of the House Committee on Water & Land,

I am testifying in support of this resolution.

I am in full support of building community engagement and resiliency, as well as caring for our environment and ecosystems, thus I am in full support of this resolution. I would like to suggest amending this resolution however, to recognize the potential community forests could play in supporting regenerative tourism.

Increasing stewardship activities within our state will provide more opportunities for the tourism industry to interact with, promote, and even drive stewardship of our environment alongside community. This greatly improve the relationship residents have with the state's main driver of the economy, and would benefit our state in every single way.

We need to attract tourists that contribute to our communities, our environment, and our economy in a non-extractive way. Building community forests efforts and promoting them within our state - to hotels, local media, local channels - as well as nationally and internationally, is how we can be spending our tax dollars to truly improve Hawaii's economy, environment, and relationship with tourism.

Let's utilize our efforts like community forests, to shift tourism and move away from the current extractive industry that it is today. Let's utilize this to start moving towards real change to improve tourism in Hawaii and the community's relationship with the industry.

Mahalo for your consideration,
Keoni Shizuma