

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
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STATE OF HAWAII | KA MOKUAĀINA 'Ō HAWAII'
DEPARTMENT OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES
KA 'OIHANA KUMUWAIWAI 'ĀINA

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LAND
STATE PARKS

Testimony of
DAWN N. S. CHANG
Chairperson

Before the Senate Committee on
WATER AND LAND

Wednesday, March 13, 2024
1:00 PM

State Capitol, Conference Room 229 and Via Videoconference

In consideration of
HOUSE BILL 1581 HOUSE DRAFT 1
RELATING TO WILDFIRE PREVENTION

House Bill 1581 House Draft 1 proposes to appropriate funds to the Department of Land and Natural Resources to develop a native plant nurseries and seed bank initiative program. **The Department of Land and Natural Resources (Department) strongly supports this measure, provided that its passage does not replace or adversely impact priorities indicated in the Executive FY 2025 Supplemental Budget Request and offers the following comments.**

Native seed availability is a critical bottleneck for post-fire rehabilitation on lands across the state. The Department's Division of Forestry and Wildlife has been working to increase statewide nursery and seed banking capacity to meet the urgent need for post-fire treatments. The funds appropriated by this bill would help the Department meet this need.

The Department also notes that while re-vegetation with native plants can be an important way to mitigate future risk, resources beyond seed availability can limit successful native revegetation efforts. Some areas require fencing to exclude hoofed animals which can quickly devour native vegetation. Drier areas might require irrigation for native plants to successfully establish, and sustained management such as invasive plant control is often required on an ongoing basis.

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



HB 1581 HD1
RELATING TO WILDFIRE PREVENTION
Senate Committee on Water and Land

March 13, 2024

1:00 PM

Conference Room 229

The Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA) **SUPPORTS** HB 1581 HD1, which addresses critical issues related to wildfire prevention in the State of Hawai‘i. **OHA would like to commend this proactive measure following the Maui wildfires in August 2023.**

The findings from the bipartisan interim working groups, specifically the wildfire prevention working group, highlight the urgent need for preventative action to mitigate the risks of wildfires across the state. The wildfire prevention working group's recommendation to increase support for native plant nurseries and seed bank initiatives aligns with the best practices in ecosystem restoration and wildfire risk reduction.

We believe dedicated funds for the development of a native plant nurseries and seed bank initiative program is a crucial step towards addressing the immediate challenges faced by our communities, especially in West Maui. Native plant nurseries and seed banks are essential in creating an inventory for watershed restoration projects and initiatives focused on restoring ecosystems to their natural fire patterns.

Preserving Hawai‘i’s unique biodiversity, including culturally significant plant species can play a vital role in contributing to ecosystem resilience while honoring Native Hawaiian practices and knowledge. Thus, supporting initiatives that help native plants thrive can support all Hawai‘i as well as the State’s obligations to Native Hawaiians.

In conclusion, we urge the committee to **ADVANCE HB1581 HD1**, recognizing its potential to safeguard our communities, preserve Hawai‘i’s natural beauty, and uphold the cultural heritage of the Native Hawaiian people. Mahalo nui for the opportunity to testify on this important issue.



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

Legislative Testimony

Hō'ike Mana'o I Mua O Ka 'Aha'ōlelo

Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Water and Land
Wednesday, March 13, 2024 at 1:00 p.m.

By
Don Drake
Interim Director
Harold L. Lyon Arboretum
And
Michael Bruno, PhD
Provost
University of Hawai'i at Manoa

HB 1581 HD1 – RELATING TO WILDFIRE PREVENTION

Chair Inouye, Vice Chair Elefante, and Members of the Committee:

The University of Hawai'i supports HB 1581 HD1, which appropriates funds to the Department of Land and Natural Resources to develop native plant nurseries and a seed bank initiative program.

The Wildfire Prevention Working Group's draft report (11/1/2023) identifies wildfire as a serious threat to the people, infrastructure, and natural environment in the Hawaiian Islands. Most wildfires occur on land dominated by introduced plants, especially invasive grass species. One way to reduce the risk and impacts of future fires is to replace these invasive grasses with native woody plant species that are less prone to wildfire. Ideally, this should be done before fires occur, but it can also be done after fires to prevent fire-prone grasses from regenerating and fueling repeated wildfires.

A key step toward restoring burned—or cleared—grassland to native shrublands and forests can be achieved by sowing the land with seeds of native plants. Currently, the capacity to do that is limited by the availability of sufficient quantities of appropriate native seeds. A system for generating and storing seeds of common forest species is required to make this possible.

The Wildfire Prevention Working Group estimates that 20,000 acres of land burns every year in Hawai'i. Sowing that land with enough native seeds to regenerate native forest would require hundreds of millions of seeds. Some of those seeds might be sourced from wild plant populations, but a more effective source would be from dedicated seed orchards in which native plants are grown to produce seeds for post-fire restoration. These seeds could be stored in seed banking facilities until needed.

Storage of dried, frozen seeds in a seed bank is a well-tested and cost-efficient way of maintaining viable seeds of many species. Research at the Seed Science Laboratory at University of Hawai'i's Lyon Arboretum has determined that 79% of Hawaiian native flowering plant species produce seeds that can be stored viably in a seed bank for many years—often decades. Lyon Arboretum is home to the state's largest and most diverse seed bank, housing over 30 million seeds of more than 600 native plant species. Other seed banks throughout the

state also store seeds of rare native plants. Their activities are coordinated through the Hawai'i Seed Bank Partnership, which is facilitated by Laukahi, the Hawai'i Plant Conservation Network.

Hawai'i's existing seed banks excel at the critical task of conserving the state's many endangered plant species. However, they lack the resources and capacity to bank the hundreds of millions of seeds of common species that would be required for large-scale restoration of the thousands of acres of land that burn every year. A dedicated seed processing and seed banking facility would be required to bank seeds at the scale needed to restore land at a significant scale.

We support HB1581 HD1's recommendation for an initiative to increase the capacity of native plant nurseries and seed banks to provide native plants to restore native ecosystems and reduce fire risk.

It is worth noting that the Federal Government is already supporting fire recovery initiatives, providing opportunities for synergistic programs with the state. In FY24, the U.S. National Parks (USNP) and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) received funding for the project "Protecting the Native Hawaiian Flora from Wildfire" under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law's Burned Area Rehabilitation funding opportunity. This will support seed collection and storage, seed and plant production, and restoration and out-planting on Department of Interior lands throughout Hawai'i. It includes collecting seeds from rare plants threatened by wildfire, and from more common native species that support healthy, resilient habitats. One of the goals of this project is to support the design and development of the native plant supply chain in Hawai'i. USNP and USFWS will be working with partners, including Lyon Arboretum on this project.



March 13, 2024

Senate Committee on Water & Land
Chair Lorraine Inouye
Vice Chair Brandon Elefante
Members of the Committee
Via Electronic Transmission

Re: The Imperative of Allocating Adequate Funding to Protect Natural Resources
Support HB 1581 HD1, Relating to Wildfire Prevention

Aloha!

Thank you for the opportunity to support HB 1581 HD1 Relating to Wildfire Prevention. Taking care of our 'āina and making funding available for preventive measures to protect, restore and nurture our land and ocean is the best insurance policy against wildfires, floods, and other disasters.

We all saw the devastating effects of the wildfires on Maui last August. No one wants another wildfire, flood, or any other disaster in our islands. The Care for 'Āina Now coalition believes it is vitally important for our state to have funds dedicated to protecting and restoring our natural resources to prevent or mitigate the effects of climate events. This proactive, preventive approach to stewardship of our islands requires an investment in our 'āina. This measure is one of many initiatives that we support to increase funding for the incredibly important work that the Department of Land and Natural Resources does.

The Maui wildfires have now amplified to every resident, and indeed the world, that no region in the world is immune to the impact of this climate crisis. We are a coalition of individuals and organizations committed to supporting better management of the state's natural resources. We estimate that an additional \$360 million annually is needed to close the current budget shortfall in protecting our islands against climate threats and the impacts of tourism. At its most basic level, this funding is necessary for wildfire prevention strategies.

Natural resources are the lifeblood of our pae 'āina, providing us with the essentials for survival and the foundation for Hawai'i's economy, our very society. These resources include clean air and water, fertile soil, living coral reefs, stable coastlines and beaches, biodiversity and healthy forests. We commend the legislature, cognizant of the local and global threats to these riches, for declaring Hawai'i to be the first state in the nation to declare a climate emergency. Protecting and restoring these resources is a moral, economic, and ecological imperative.

Based on the foregoing, we support this bill and strongly advocate for increased support for native plant nurseries and seed bank initiatives to provide inventory for watershed restoration projects and projects that restore ecosystems to natural fire patterns.

In addition, we also support including additional revenue to fund DLNR so that Hawai'i can:

- Remove flammable nonnative plants and restore sites with less flammable native plants.
- Restore coral reefs to help protect our beaches and coastal communities from sea level rise and storm surges, while also protecting the fisheries that draw tourists and sustain local residents.
- Restore watershed forests that protect our water quality and supplies, in addition to reducing the risks of fire.
- Provide grants to local communities to assist them in managing and restoring natural resources, including reducing their fire risks.

Preventing damage to natural resources is often more cost-effective than trying to restore them once they have been degraded. For example, restoring a polluted stream can be far more expensive than preventing pollution in the first place. Wildfire prevention can be significantly more cost-effective than paying for the cost of responding to wildfires and restoring damaged communities and natural resources. Legislators who allocate funding for protection and restoration are, in essence, making a sound long-term investment in their constituents, well-being, and the environment.

We have a moral responsibility to protect the natural resources that sustain life on our islands. Future generations depend on the decisions we make today. Legislators have a unique role in shaping policies that reflect our ethical obligation to safeguard the environment for all living beings.

In conclusion, there are numerous compelling reasons why legislators should approve funding to protect, restore, and manage Hawai'i's magnificent and irreplaceable natural resources. Disaster resilience, climate change mitigation, clean water and air, sustainable agriculture, economic benefits, public health, long-term cost savings, biodiversity conservation, and ethical responsibility all underscore the importance of such investments. By allocating the necessary funds, legislators can secure a brighter and more sustainable future for all. It is a responsibility that cannot be ignored, and the benefits far outweigh the costs.

We look forward to working with you to ensure that our natural resources are at the forefront of policy-leaders' minds and that the state budget reflects these priorities.

Mahalo,

Care for 'Āina Now Coalition

Website: careforainanow.org

Contact: aloha@careforainanow.org



Testimony of **Lahaina Strong**
Before the Senate Committee on
Water & Land

In Consideration of House Bill No. 1581 HD1
RELATING TO WILDFIRE PREVENTION

To Chair Inouye, Vice Chair Elefante, and the honorable members of the committees,

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 strong support of HB1581 HD1, which appropriates funds to the Department of Land and Natural Resources to develop a native plant nurseries and seed bank initiative program.

HB1581 HD1 aims to address the critical need for wildfire prevention and mitigation in the aftermath of the devastating Maui wildfires of August 2023. We commend the efforts of the bipartisan interim wildfire prevention working group established by the House of Representatives to evaluate the post-fire landscape and propose actionable solutions for legislative consideration in the regular session of 2024. A recommendation of the working group (a collaborative effort involving federal, state, and county agencies, as well as community stakeholders) was to increase support for native plant nurseries and seed bank initiatives to provide inventory for watershed restoration projects and projects that restore ecosystems to natural fire patterns.

Enhancing watershed restoration and revitalizing native ecosystems, are integral initiatives for bolstering resilience and recovery in the face of wildfire patterns in West Maui. Protecting biodiversity, adapting to climate change, and managing water and soil are critical components of wildfire prevention. By supporting native plant nurseries and seed banks, we can make significant strides in achieving our common objectives.

A focus on wildfire prevention is paramount for safeguarding our communities and natural resources from future fire disasters. The proposal to enhance backing for native plant nurseries and seed bank programs resonates with Lahaina Strong's dedication to the restoration of 'Mala Ulu o Lele, formerly abundant and fruitful, which has now transformed into a dry, invasive, and fire-vulnerable environment due to more than a century of deforestation and water diversion.

While we support the aims of this bill, Lahaina Strong also acknowledges the possibility that DLNR might not be the most optimal entity to undertake the proposed initiatives. The University of Hawaii hosts programs that could be suited for this task, leveraging its research and educational infrastructure. Additionally, Maui-based local and native nurseries stand ready to contribute, offering both expertise and an economic boost to our post-fire recovery efforts. Directing resources to these local nurseries could also help minimize the need for inter-island transportation of plant materials, a practice known to inadvertently spread invasive species, thereby enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of the restoration efforts.

In conclusion, Lahaina Strong urges the legislature to expeditiously pass HB1581 HD1 to support the establishment of native plant nurseries and seed bank initiatives. By investing in proactive wildfire prevention measures, we can safeguard our communities, preserve our natural environment, and build a more resilient future for all residents of Hawaii.

Mahalo for your attention to this critical matter, and we appreciate your commitment to the well-being of Lahaina and a more resilient and sustainable future for its residents.

Sincerely,

Jordan Ruidas, Pa'ele Kiakona, & Courtney Lazo

Lahaina Strong

**Testimony of The Nature Conservancy
Support for HB 1581 HD1, Relating to Wildfire Prevention
Committee on Water and Land
March 13, 2024, 1:00 p.m.
Conference Room 229 & Videoconference**

Aloha Chair Inouye, Vice Chair Elefante, and Members of the Committee:

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) **supports** HB 1581 HD1, relating to wildfire prevention, which appropriates funds to the Department of Land and Natural Resources to develop native plant nurseries and seed bank initiatives.

Hawai'i is becoming increasingly prone to wildfire due to climate change and inadequate natural resource management. Due to climate change, we are experiencing increased droughts, reduced precipitation, hotter temperatures, more intense storms, spread of invasive species, and other impacts of climate change that increase wildfire probability. As we saw on Maui, the impacts on communities and the environment from wildfire can be devastating. Because of these impacts, the State and all stakeholders must take action to reduce fire risk and increase our islands' resilience.

This bill would help develop native plant nurseries and seed bank initiatives which over time would increase the inventory for watershed restoration and projects that restore other native ecosystems which have increased resilience and recovery in the presence of natural fire patterns.

Protection of biodiversity, climate change adaptation, water management, soil management, and other forms of mālama 'āina are all critical to preventing wildfire risk. Native plant nurseries and seed banking efforts go a long way to helping to achieve our shared goals. All of this requires coordination, comprehensive planning, and consistent funding. This bill would be an important step forward.

For over 40 years, TNC has actively managed nature preserves throughout Hawai'i. We currently manage 40,000 acres in preserves on Hawai'i Island, Maui, Moloka'i, Lāna'i, and Kaua'i. We also work with over 50 coastal communities through networks and partnerships to help protect and restore the nearshore reefs and fisheries of the main Hawaiian Islands. Over our decades of experience of forest management and marine conservation, TNC has implemented many conservation actions that reduce fire risk and it is these experiences which underpin our support for this measure. Mahalo for the opportunity to provide these comments. We appreciate your support of Hawai'i's natural resources, we look forward to continuing to support efforts to make Hawai'i more fire resilient, particularly through investments in our natural resources

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in **support** of HB 1581 HD1.

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Hawai'i Forest Industry Association

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Email: hfia@hawaiiforest.org

Date: 03/11/24

TO: WTL Chair Inouye and Vice Chair Elefante, and WTL Committee Members Chang, McKelvey, Fevella

FROM: Hawai'i Forest Industry Association (HFIA)

SUBJECT: Testimony in Support of HB1581 HD1 Relating to Wildfire Prevention

Dear Chair Inouye, Vice Chair Elefante and WTL Committee Members,

On behalf of the Directors and members of the Hawai'i Forest Industry Association (HFIA), please support HB1581 HD1 Relating to Wildfire Prevention.

The HFIA is in support of funding a native plant nursery and seedbank initiative. Efforts to mitigate and prevent wildfires must include a wide use of native species, which are adept at restoring and stabilizing Hawaii's ecosystems to less fire prone states of being. Our capacity to collect and store native seeds, propagate and grow native plants, and then sell and utilize those plants in both back yard restoration efforts and at larger restorations sites is essential in preventing future wildfire disasters.

We hope that you will support HB1581 SD1.

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
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TESTIMONY FROM THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF HAWAII

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WATER AND LAND

MARCH 13, 2024

HB 1581, HD1, RELATING TO WILDFIRE PREVENTION

POSITION: SUPPORT

The Democratic Party of Hawai'i **supports** HB 1581, HD1, relating to wildfire prevention. 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 native plant and watershed restoration programs that reestablish natural fire patterns and improve natural ecosystem resilience to future emergencies. As was widely reported after the Maui wildfires, including in the New York Times, invasive species have been turning parts of our island home into a tinderbox.

After the demise of sugar cane plantations in the 1990s, large tracts of land were abandoned, allowing drought-resistant invasive grasslands to become unmanaged sources of fuel for wildfires. Clay Trauernicht, a fire ecologist at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa, has noted that the annual area burned by wildfires in our state has risen by as much as 300 percent in recent decades, a figure that will increase as the climate crisis worsens.

Over the last few years, researchers have been testing strategies in Hawai'i to limit the spread of wildfires in areas dominated by fire-promoting grasses. Green fire breaks—strategically planted strips of vegetation—have been effectively used in the continental U.S. as a complement to traditional firefighting methods. Water-rich and inflammable native plants can help deprive wildfires of fuel, while also serving as habitat for other native species and a seed source for further restoration projects.

Mahalo nui loa,

Kris Coffield
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Abby Simmons
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HB-1581-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/9/2024 11:07:16 AM

Testimony for WTL on 3/13/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jacqueline S. Ambrose	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

RELATING TO WILDFIRE PREVENTION.

Yes for funds to the department of land and natural resources to develop a native plant nurseries and seed bank initiative program

HB-1581-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/10/2024 9:26:14 PM

Testimony for WTL on 3/13/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Tamara Paltin	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I am testifying in strong support of HB 1581. Being able to re-establish our native plants through native plant nurseries and seed bank initiatives are critical for the perpetuation and restoration of our watersheds which are essential to life in these islands.

Mahalo for your service and commitment to our communities,

Tamara Paltin

HB-1581-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/11/2024 10:18:42 AM

Testimony for WTL on 3/13/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Riley Bond	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Chair and Members of the Committee,

As a resident of Lahaina and a mother deeply concerned about the future of our environment, I am writing to express my strong support for H.B. 1581. This bill, which aims to increase support for native plant nurseries and seed bank initiatives, is crucial for preserving our precious ecosystems and reducing the risk of devastating fires.

By adopting the recommendation of the wildfire prevention working group to invest in native plant nurseries and seed bank initiatives, H.B. 1581 aligns with my values and aspirations for our community. Supporting native plant restoration projects not only helps to restore ecosystems to their natural fire patterns but also promotes biodiversity and resilience in our environment. I believe it is our responsibility to ensure that future generations inherit a healthy and thriving natural environment. By prioritizing investments in wildfire prevention and native plant restoration, we can create a more sustainable future for our children and grandchildren.

I commend the legislature for recognizing the importance of exceeding the general fund expenditure ceiling to support initiatives that serve the public interest. Investing in wildfire prevention is an investment in the long-term health and prosperity of our communities, outweighing any short-term financial concerns.

In conclusion, I urge the legislature to pass H.B. NO. 1581 and allocate the necessary funds to support native plant nurseries and seed bank initiatives. Let us work together to protect our land, preserve our native plants, and ensure a brighter future for generations to come. Thank you for considering my testimony in support of this critical bill.

Sincerely,

Riley Bond

HB-1581-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/11/2024 4:10:29 PM

Testimony for WTL on 3/13/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Cedar Wilson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support HB1581 in regards to the DLN_r in developing a native plant nursery and seed bank initiative program.

HB-1581-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/12/2024 7:57:51 AM

Testimony for WTL on 3/13/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jackie Keefe	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Inouye, Vice Chair Elefante, and Members of the Committee on Water and Land,

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

I am writing in support of HB1581 HD1 with comment.

While I fully agree with the need to support native plant nurseries and seed bank initiatives, I disagree with the approach.

I understand that the money likely needs to be administratively attached to the DLNR because it is government funding, but I believe that the money would go further if it was intended to support local plant nurseries and seed banking initiatives that are already in existence.

It would cost more to start this up as a new program through a government agency than it would to provide the funding to those community groups who are already doing the work. Communities on the ground have a far better understanding of which seeds are most needed and have the nurseries already in operation. They are also far more efficient in their use of funding, as they have a deep appreciation for each dollar they receive.

As a community, we can see that the DLNR is already stretched far too thin, and I believe they would appreciate this modification to the bill.

Thank you for your consideration.

Jackie Keefe

LATE

HB-1581-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/12/2024 1:31:36 PM

Testimony for WTL on 3/13/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Isis Usborne	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this measure.