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

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HISTORIC PRESERVATION  
KAHOOLAWE ISLAND RESERVE COMMISSION  
LAND  
STATE PARKS

Testimony of  
DAWN N. S. CHANG  
Chairperson

Before the Senate Committee on  
WATER AND LAND

Friday, April 11, 2025  
1:00 PM

State Capitol, Conference Room 229 and Via Videoconference

In consideration of  
HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION 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.

House Concurrent Resolution 40 urges 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 to better 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, carbon sequestration, erosion reduction, and food and medicine generation. Moreover, they play a key role in honoring and

providing opportunities for traditional and customary Native Hawaiian practices and promoting aloha ʻāina.

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 Hawaiʻi 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.



Testimony Before The  
Senate Committee on Water & Land (WTL)  
**IN SUPPORT OF HCR40**  
April 11, 2025, 1:00 p.m., Room 229 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 HCR40 as an incremental step towards 'āina momona.**

This measure works 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 this resolution 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** HCR40.

**Aloha ‘Āina Momona no nā kau ā kau.**



April 9 2025

To: Chair Lorraine Inoye, Vice Chair Brandon Elefante, and the Senate Committee on Water and Land.

Subject: **HCR 40 and HR 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.

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

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**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.

**LATE**

**HCR-40**

Submitted on: 4/10/2025 1:01:00 PM  
Testimony for WTL on 4/11/2025 1:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Irene Sprecher	Testifying for Hawaii Forest Industry Association	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair Inouye and WTL Committee members,

On behalf of the Directors of the Hawai'i Forest Industry Association (HFIA), this testimony is in support of HCR40.

The state of Hawaii is home to many acres of forested public lands and the HFIA supports the coordination and collaboration of DOFAW with community groups to steward those forests.

Such collaboration is good for the forests, creates value within communities, and fosters a closer relationship between the State and community members.

Please support HCR40.

Irene Sprecher,

President of the Hawaii Forest Industry Association