



HB941
RELATING TO THE NATURAL AREA RESERVES SYSTEM COMMISSION
House Committee on Ocean, Marine Resources, and Hawaiian Affairs

February 6, 2013

9:00 a.m.

Room 325

The Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA) **SUPPORTS** HB941, which seeks to add a cultural expert to the Natural Area Reserves Commission.

The Natural Area Reserves (NARS) Program carries out vital parts of the state's responsibility to conserve, protect, and manage our natural and cultural resources, and specifically works to preserve representative samples of Hawai'i's diverse biological systems for study by and the appreciation of Hawai'i's residents. The NARS commission accordingly consists of experts in various fields of environmental science, as well as representatives from the hiking and hunting communities, to provide recommendations as to the selection and treatment of areas to be included in the NARS program.

However, despite its broad representative knowledge from the scientific and outdoor recreational communities, the NARS commission currently lacks a member specifically qualified to provide insight as to the cultural value and significance of existing and potential future reserves, or the many cultural resources they may contain. This may lead to inefficiencies or oversights, particularly given the responsibilities of all state agencies to protect and enforce the rights of Native Hawaiians, and to fulfill the state's interest in perpetuating Native Hawaiian culture and cultural values.

Adding a cultural expert to the NARS Commission will mitigate any conflicts with traditional and cultural practices, help to better identify and preserve cultural sites and resources, and otherwise improve the overall effectiveness of both the NARS Commission and the NARS Program.

Therefore, OHA urges the Committee to **PASS** HB941. Mahalo for the opportunity to testify on this important matter.

NEIL ABERCROMBIE
GOVERNOR OF HAWAII



**STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES**

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HISTORIC PRESERVATION
KAHOOLAWE ISLAND RESERVE COMMISSION
LAND
STATE PARKS

**Testimony of
WILLIAM J. AILA, JR.
Chairperson**

**Before the House Committee on
OCEAN, MARINE RESOURCES, & HAWAIIAN AFFAIRS**

**Wednesday, February 06, 2013
9:00 AM
State Capitol, Conference Room 325**

**In consideration of
HOUSE BILL 941
RELATING TO THE NATURAL AREA RESERVES SYSTEM COMMISSION**

The Department of Land and Natural Resources (Department) is in strong support of House Bill 941, an Administration measure which proposes to amend the composition of the Natural Area Reserves System (NARS) Commission by adding a member possessing a background in native Hawaiian traditional and customary practices, and to remove the Superintendent of Education as a member.

NARS was established to preserve and protect representative samples of Hawaiian biological ecosystems and geological formations. NARS presently consists of 19 reserves on five islands, encompassing more than 109,000 acres of the State's most unique ecosystems. The diverse areas found in NARS range from marine and coastal environments to lava flows, tropical rainforests, and even an alpine desert. Within these areas one can find rare plants and animals, many of which are on the edge of extinction. NARS also protects some of the major watershed areas which provide our vital sources of fresh water.

The NARS Commission was created to establish criteria to be used in determining whether an area is suitable for inclusion in NARS; recommend to the Governor and the Department areas suitable for inclusion in NARS; establish policies and criteria regarding the management, protection, and permitted uses of areas which are part of NARS; develop ways and means of extending and strengthening presently established preserves, sanctuaries, and refuges with the State; and advise the Department and other public agencies managing state-owned land or natural resources regarding areas under their respective jurisdictions which are or may be appropriate for designation as natural area reserves. Currently, the NARS Commission is made

up of 13 members, six of whom possess scientific qualifications as evidenced by an academic degree in wildlife or marine biology, botany, forestry, ecology, resource management, biogeography, zoology, or geology, one member whom shall have membership in a hiking organization organized in the State, and one member whom shall possess membership in a hunting organization in the State.

Having an individual with a background in native Hawaiian traditional and customary practices on the NARS Commission will improve the effectiveness of the Commission in overseeing and advising on the management of cultural and archeological resources within natural area reserves.

The Department has consulted with the Department of Education (DOE) regarding the proposed removal of the Superintendent of Education as a member from the NARS Commission and DOE expressed no reservation or opposition.