THE SENATE
THIRTY-THIRD LEGISLATURE, 2026
STATE OF HAWAII

S.B. NO. 3253

JAN 28 2026

A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO CONSERVATION.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF HAWAII:

SECTION 1. The legislature finds that numerous species in Hawaii are on the brink of extinction, in particular many indigenous birds found nowhere else in the world. While the State has made progress in addressing the myriad causes contributing to extinction, the legislature finds that existing efforts must be supplemented to prevent further loss of biodiversity.

The legislature recognizes that Zealandia (Te Mara a Tane) is a pioneering conservation sanctuary in Wellington, New Zealand, best known for proving how dramatically nature can rebound with proper protection. Built as a fully fenced, predator-excluded sanctuary, Zealandia creates a safe haven where native birds, reptiles, and plants thrive and recover in near-natural habitats, safe from invasive predators and vectors. This model has not only enabled the reintroduction and rapid growth of iconic native species that were once on the brink of

extinction, but it has also transformed the valley into a living example of ecosystem restoration in a modern city.

Just as importantly, Zealandia's impact extends beyond its fence line: thriving populations disperse outward into surrounding neighborhoods and green spaces, helping native wildlife return to the wider region. Zealandia also facilitates community engagement by welcoming volunteers, residents, researchers, and visitors and serving as a hub for school programs and hands-on learning. Its success in engaging community and visitors has helped Zealandia become largely self-funding through admissions, memberships, tours, and experiences that reinvest directly into conservation.

The legislature also recognizes that successful sanctuary models in the United States generate substantial revenue for conservation efforts. They serve as educational centers for local schools, destinations for visitors, and provide critical habitat for endangered and other species. Hawaii's climate and environment offer a more natural habitat for many species than found elsewhere in the continental United States. With appropriate considerations and protections to ensure no adverse impact on Hawaii's own environment, the State can improve the

living conditions of rescued animals from other states and generate significant revenue for Hawaii's conservation efforts.

The legislature believes that the State is uniquely positioned to become a national center for endangered species research, education, and protection. Establishing sanctuaries in Hawaii like those that have proven successful elsewhere can advance the State's position as the premier place for endangered species work and conservation and create pathways for local education, jobs, investment, and research.

The legislature also believes that these successful nonprofit models for establishing and operating potential endangered species sanctuaries are preferable to a government-run program. They provide more flexibility and adaptability for management, operations, innovation, and community engagement.

Accordingly, the purpose of this Act is to enable the establishment of a nonprofit partner to collaborate with the State to create and manage endangered species sanctuaries.

SECTION 2. Chapter 195D, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is amended by adding a new section to part II to be appropriately designated and to read as follows:

"§195D- **Hawaii conservation sanctuary; established.** (a) There shall be established the Hawaii conservation sanctuary as a nonprofit group to work with the department to enhance and support the work of conservation and endangered species and wildlife preservation, and to oversee ancillary programs.

(b) The Hawaii conservation sanctuary shall protect and expand populations of endangered species and other wildlife from within and outside the State by developing and operating conservation sanctuaries in the State.

(c) The Hawaii conservation sanctuary may:

(1) Operate for-profit business enterprises;

(2) Hold or lease property; and

(3) Enter into contracts to support its mission

(d) The qualifying standards and conditions related to the receipt of funds contained in chapter 42F shall not apply to funds received by the Hawaii conservation sanctuary; provided that if the Hawaii conservation sanctuary in turn contracts with a recipient or provider, then the qualifying standards, conditions, and other provisions of chapter 42F shall apply to the recipient or provider and the contract.

(e) The department shall assist the Hawaii conservation sanctuary with identifying and accessing appropriate land to support its mission."

SECTION 3. New statutory material is underscored.

SECTION 4. This Act shall take effect upon its approval.

INTRODUCED BY: _____

S.B. NO. 3253

Report Title:
DLNR; Hawaii Conservation Sanctuary; Endangered Species; Wildlife; Conservation

Description:
Establishes the Hawaii Conservation Sanctuary as a nonprofit group to work with the Department of Land and Natural Resources to support conservation, wildlife preservation, and ancillary programs by establishing sanctuaries in the State.

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