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STATE OF HAWAII | KA MOKU'ĀINA 'O HAWAI'I
DEPARTMENT OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES
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KAHOOLAWE ISLAND RESERVE COMMISSION
LAND
STATE PARK

**Testimony of
RYAN K.P. KANAKA'OLE
Acting Chairperson**

**Before the Senate Committee on
WATER, LAND, CULTURE AND THE ARTS**

**Wednesday, February 18, 2026
1:01 PM**

State Capitol, Conference Room 224 and Via Videoconference

**In consideration of
SENATE BILL 2351
RELATING TO THE STATE PARKS SPECIAL FUND**

Senate Bill 2351 authorizes the Department of Land and Natural Resources to expend the moneys from the State Parks Special Fund for programs aimed at environmental protection. **The Department of Land and Natural Resources (Department) respectfully opposes this bill.**

The Division of State Parks (DSP) and its program I.D. - LNR806 - is included in the State Budget bracket under "Culture and Recreation". The program is mandated to: *Enrich the lives of people of all ages by providing and preserving opportunities and facilities for cultural and recreational activities.* DSP's core objective is to implement this overarching mandate for the enjoyment and safety of the public.

Due to a series of budget reductions over decades, the DSP's operating budget was inadequate to provide the needed maintenance and management of aging facilities and infrastructure, of which many were constructed in the 1960s and early 1970s. Subsequently, over the years DSP has relied upon capital improvement project (CIP) funding to execute what should have been repair and maintenance (R&M) in operational expenditure plans. From the years 2010 to 2021, the DSP budget only increased by 7 million dollars (from 8 million to 15 million dollars) staying just a little ahead of inflation. Concurrently, public interest in outdoor recreation increased along with Hawai'i's visitor numbers. In 2010 there were 7,083,663 visitors and in 2019, the pre-pandemic high, Hawai'i hosted 10,424,995 visitors. Our State parks are a key element of visitor industry activity, both attracting visitors, and withstanding their constant impacts.

DSP staffing was reduced from approximately 200 in the 1990s to a low of 128 in 2010 – the least amount of park staff in the U.S. State Park System. Thankfully, with legislative support, DSP is now rebuilding its staff base, currently at 155 positions. These factors, combined with the creation of additional State park units, has resulted in the poor condition of many features and facilities due to overuse, deferred maintenance, and understaffing.

To correct this, during the pandemic closure in 2020, DSP initiated a camping, lodging, parking, and entry fee increase. DSP rates are now commensurate with comparable features across the country, even though our facilities are in many cases below the quality of other U.S. state park standards. Out-of-state visitors generate most of this income, and the messaging is that their fees are being specifically reinvested into the Hawai'i State Park System.

It is the goal of DSP to use these funds to continue addressing deferred repair and maintenance, initiating value-added park improvements, such as a statewide upgrade of our camping and lodging facilities, and managing operating costs, while sustaining a base budget of general funds for staff salaries and utilities.

DSP has completed new State park standards for campsite upgrades and initiated critical ADA upgrades as well as a phased path to implementation statewide. This will include replacement/upgrades of all existing campgrounds and add 'ohana and group campsites to accommodate the way local families prefer to camp. Utilizing some of DSP's special funds, this is estimated to cost between \$25-\$40 million to complete statewide.

DSP is working on an initiative to address deferred and re-occurring maintenance through a Preferred Contractor Contract (PCC) process that will award and manage multiple contracts to perform a full range of repair and maintenance projects.

DSP has deferred maintenance statewide on critical infrastructure and facilities estimated at \$96,728,000. The PCC initiative is dependent on the DSP special fund revenue, which will provide quality park amenities and visitor experiences commensurate with the quality of natural and cultural resources we manage.

Current FY26 anticipated expenditures for the State Parks Special Fund include recurring costs such as Lifeguard Contracts, Diamond Head State Monument, District Contracts (which include tree trimming, gate closures, security, porta potties), PCC Repair and Maintenance and Capital Improvement Projects (which include plans, design, construction and statewide campsite standards and upgrades).

Administration	\$12,940,977
Diamond Head SM	\$ 3,000,000
District Contracts	\$ 2,977,123
PCC R&M	\$ 3,366,260
CIP	\$11,690,110
Total	\$33,974,470

There are other Department programs that do have a key role and mandates to conduct environmental protection, and they have historically had access to a variety of federal funds available to support their respective program mandates. While overall needs have never been fulfilled, the passage of the Green Fee last legislative session will provide a new source of funding, estimated to at over \$100 million annually. With the Green Fee now being implemented, it is unnecessary to tap into the far more meager annual revenues of the State Parks Special Fund, which should be reinvested into the park system until such time as the infrastructure upgrades have been completed and the quality of park amenities and visitor experiences are commensurate with the quality of natural and cultural resources we manage.

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



Hui Aloha Kiholo

Our mission is to protect, perpetuate and enhance the cultural and natural landscape of the Kiholo Bay area through collaborative management and active community stewardship.

House Committees: WLA, WAM
Hawai'i State Capitol - Room 401
415 South Beretania Street
Honolulu, HI 96813

16 February 2026

Subject: Support for SB2351 from Hui Aloha Kiholo

Dear Honorable Senators:

The Native Hawaiian Organization Hui Aloha Kiholo supports SB2351 to authorize the Hawai'i Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR) to expend the moneys from the State Parks (Parks) Special Fund for programs aimed at environmental protection, and recommends including a mechanism for Parks to award non-profit organizations funding for environmental projects that align with management plans and shared priorities.

Our 501(c)3 organization formed 18 years ago to re-establish respect and safety for Kiholo State Park. We are currently engaged in an active curatorship agreement with Parks that allows us to lead education, conservation, resource management, stewardship, and maintenance activities in close partnership with DLNR. Guided by kupa 'āina with at least 400 years of presence in the ahupua'a comprising Kiholo State Park Wilderness Reserve, within the Kona region of Kekahawai'ole, our Vision is: *A thriving cultural landscape inspiring pono connection between people and place.*

We support this measure for the following reasons, and thank you for taking the time to read this important information:

Collaborative Management Works

- **Better Together:** For the last 18 years, we have worked side by side to co-manage Kiholo State Park. During that time, we have sustained facilities when state budget funds were inadequate to cover operating expenses like lua rental and maintenance. We have invested in infrastructure including off-grid solar and security systems to protect state infrastructure. We recently completed a Wildfire Fuelbreak



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Project to minimize roadside wildfire ignition and provide precious time for a safe and orderly evacuation if we are in the path of a wildfire. Our experience is valuable as we have led evacuation efforts to calmly help visitors, campers, and our community safely exit Kiholo State Park prior to severe storms and tsunamis. We also educate our community around the rules that protect environmental and cultural treasures every day, while maintaining a core value of aloha. Together, we have been able to preserve the wilderness character of Kiholo while keeping our community safe and helping native ecosystems upon which cultural practice depends heal from historic impacts.

- **Much Work Remains:** Our Palapala 'Āina is our roadmap for action over the next 5 years. Similar to a Strategic Plan, Palapala 'Āina is action oriented. Informed by a highly inclusive and participatory multi-year input gathering process, we have identified five high-impact strategies that will ensure resilience and promote health at Kiholo State Park. These strategies are complex and ambitious, constituting a new level of stewardship that demands a new level of financial support. One of our priorities is sharing kuleana with partners. This means helping Parks and other land owners/divisions best care for the lands and waters upon which our active community depends. Providing a funding mechanism to make progress on aligned actions that benefit place and community makes good business sense and prepares Hawai'i for the next natural disaster before it happens.

Funding Drives Success

- **Honoring People of Place:** Our staff, board, and partners feel deeply accountable for Kiholo and work diligently to go above and beyond in serving our community. From our founding actions to return safety and maintain camping, to our efforts to protect, perpetuate, and enhance native ecosystems with our active community, we are inclusive and collaborative, while maintaining an unbroken connection to those who made the house sites, trails, and fishponds we work collaboratively to heal today.
- **Local Livelihoods:** At this time Hui Aloha Kiholo has a team of 10 staff focused on accomplishing our Mission. State Parks often holds us up as an example that allows them to focus limited public resources on Parks with higher traffic and dedicated state employees and we are happy to serve in this role. All of our



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rewarding local jobs are funded through grants and private donations. We envision a future where a DLNR investment in Kiholo and our Hui sustains and grows purposeful local jobs in a culturally appropriate way.

Precious Ecology

- **Wahi Pana:** One of our top priorities is to Revitalize Wahi Pana. Wahi pana are storied places, known historically and today as special biocultural environments, worthy of respect and care. We are actively engaged in healing biocultural places impacted by threats such as invasive species, sea level rise, severe storms, tsunamis, and harmful activities. Every day, our Hoa 'Aina educate the public and support local learners to understand, respect, and give back to place. This creates a ripple effect that empowers care for lands and waters far beyond Kiholo.
- **We Sustain Fish:** Songs, chants, stories, names, hula, and the first written records in Hawaiian and English highlight the original inhabitants of these lands as fishers and cultivators of fish in nearshore marine and inland waters. This tradition relies upon our continued presence and diligent effort to ensure healthy lands and waters.
- **Abundance is Vital to Resilience:** It was long said that, "A blind fisherman can catch fish at Kiholo." Our Lawai'a Pono priority seeks to revive Kiholo as a place of abundance through outreach and knowledge exchange with our fishing community, guided by the values and fishing traditions of Kiholo.
- **We Must All Respect the Places that Feed Us:** Kiholo's resilient fishing village survived multiple lava flows, tsunamis, and waves of political upheaval. The people of these lands are tenacious, as is the environment that sustains us. As we help to revive native ecosystems and environmentally-dependent cultural practices, we also heal ourselves. This reciprocal relationship is felt and is being quantified through partnerships with UH and Vibrant Hawai'i that demonstrate the healing effects of mālama 'āina to our first responder community. The potential to build upon these early pilot studies and scale up activities that benefit the environment and community is vast, and requires resources to actualize.

Authority and Accountability

- **Kuleana - People of Place:** The people of place are accountable for the health of the ocean and must mālama the generative life upon which we all depend. Parks can support the people of place



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to protect, perpetuate, and enhance the environment in a way that honors culture and tradition and is inclusive of new tools and knowledge systems.

- **Kuleana - Decision-makers:** The State of Hawai'i has a Constitutional mandate - decisions must not negatively impact traditional and protected native Hawaiian practice.
- **Kuleana - Kākou:** We all have a role to play in making the best decisions for Kiholo. Kākou is inclusive of all, and we embrace kākou. This includes all who are currently living, those who have gone before, those who will come after, and the non-human relatives who make life in these island possible from the plankton that make most of our oxygen to the corals that are foundational to our cosmology, to the Koholā that travel the vast Pacific to birth their young here. No one is unimportant or to be disregarded, whether they have deep genealogy or just arrived. Our shared kuleana guides all of our work together and everyone benefits when places heal.

We embrace shared kuleana for all life, for all life contributes to the health of Kiholo. Our public parks feed our community, and we must give back to the places that shape, nourish, inspire, and challenge us. Hawai'i needs dedicated funding for environmental protection to ensure perpetual stewardship for our precious Parks. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Chad Wiggins
Executive Director
Hui Aloha Kiholo
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808-756-2080
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TAX FOUNDATION OF HAWAII

735 Bishop Street, Suite 417

Honolulu, Hawaii 96813 Tel. 536-4587

LATE

SUBJECT: MISCELLANEOUS, Scope Creep for State Parks Special Fund

BILL NUMBER: SB 2351; HB 2348

INTRODUCED BY: SB by WAKAI, CHANG, FEVELLA, FUKUNAGA, GABBARD, KIDANI, SAN BUENAVENTURA; HB by GEDEON, ALCOS, KILA, MARTEN, MATSUMOTO, PIERICK

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Authorizes the Department of Land and Natural Resources to expend the moneys from the State Parks Special Fund for programs aimed at environmental protection.

SYNOPSIS: Amends section 184-3.4(b), HRS, to allow DLNR to spend money from the state parks special fund for “Any departmental program aimed at environmental protection.”

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon approval.

STAFF COMMENTS: Page 14 of Departmental Communication 115 (2026) discusses the State Parks Special Fund. It’s now a perfectly legitimate special fund which takes in camping, lodging, parking and entry fees as well as lease rents and commercial use fees. It uses the money to supplement operational expenses, repairs and maintenance, contracts and services, lifeguard contracts and recurring costs for the management and operation of state parks. In 2024 and 2025, its expenses have averaged about \$10 million, and the revenues it brings in are around \$20 million annually. At the end of both fiscal years, it had an unencumbered balance north of \$30 million.

To deal with this large wad of cash, DLNR in this bill is proposing “scope creep” – expanding the allowed uses of special fund monies to let it spend money on activities or programs that may have little or nothing to do with state parks.

The Legislature has itself established criteria for when a special fund may be maintained (HRS section 37-52.3). Those criteria are that the special fund:

(1) Serves a need, as demonstrated by:

- (A) The purpose of the program to be supported by the fund;
- (B) The scope of the program, including financial information on fees to be charged, sources of projected revenue, and costs; and
- (C) An explanation of why the program cannot be implemented successfully under the general fund appropriation process;

(2) Reflects a clear nexus between the benefits sought and charges made upon the program users or beneficiaries or a clear link between the program and the sources of revenue, as opposed to

serving primarily as a means to provide the program or users with an automatic means of support that is removed from the normal budget and appropriation process;

(3) Provides an appropriate means of financing for the program or activity that is used only when essential to the successful operation of the program or activity; and

(4) Demonstrates the capacity to be financially self-sustaining.

With the amendment proposed by this bill, namely expansion of the scope of the fund to cover any departmental program “aimed at” environmental protection (whatever that means), the fund will violate these criteria.

Obviously, DLNR would prefer to spend the excess millions on whatever it wants without oversight or interference by the Legislature. It is hard to imagine anything DLNR does that is not aimed at environmental protection. We would prefer that excess money be returned to the general fund for the Legislature, whose members are directly accountable to the electorate, to deploy for the greater good of the State.

Digested: 2/17/2026



HUI MAKA'ĀINANA O MAKANA

The Hui Maka'āinana o Makana is a non-profit organization dedicated to perpetuating and teaching the skills, knowledge, and practices of our kūpuna (ancestors) through the interpretation, restoration, care, and protection of natural and cultural resources in Hā'ena, Kaua'i.

LATE

RE: RELATING TO THE STATE PARKS SPECIAL FUND Authorizes the Department of Land and Natural Resources to expend the moneys from the State Parks Special Fund for programs aimed at environmental protection

2/18/2026

Aloha Chair Lee, Vice Chair Inouye, and Members of the Committee,

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony late, I think this is incredibly important in the context of our work. I am Billy Kinney, and I am testifying on behalf of the Hui Maka'āinana o Makana (the Hui), a nonprofit established in 1998 to support the care and management of Hā'ena State Park (HSP). Dedicated to the skills, knowledge, and the practices of our ancestors the Hui has been collaborating with State Parks to restore, care for, and protect the lands of HSP. The Hui has been instrumental in shaping what collaborative care and co-management looks like in Hawai'i: since the late 90's the Hui has worked closely with State Parks to steward HSP via curatorship, the Hui has created important management schema with the Division of Aquatic Resources and DOCARE establishing the first CBSFA with a management plan and rules package in 2015, and; the Hui would also go on care for the state park, including its beaches, through a regenerative, community-led, collaborative management access model since 2019 with DLNR, State Parks, and other agencies.

The Hui is in opposition to SB2351.

When §184-3.4 State parks special fund was created, it allowed for the revenue generated in the state parks that had revenue-potential to be able to provide for the care and maintenance of other state parks. This special fund is crucial to the upkeep of the 'āina, the land, the facilities, the staffing, the programs – but, more importantly this special fund has been critical to State Parks (SP) ability to steward community relationships with those who mālama 'āina and collaborate with them. The expending of funds elsewhere will deplete the necessary support systems in place for SP's staff to engage or approach community collaboration and care of Hawai'i's state parks that do not have the ability to generate revenue for itself.

On behalf of the Hui Maka'āinana o Makana, please do not allow the DLNR to expend important resources collected by larger, popular parks that should be used to care for and maintain similar



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State Park inventory properties that are equally as important to Hawai'i and the public. Please do not support this measure.

Mahalo nui for the opportunity to testify,

William "Billy" Kinney
Assistant Director, Hui Maka'ainana O Makana
P.O. Box 1225 Hanalei, HI 96714

SB-2351

Submitted on: 2/17/2026 11:34:25 AM

Testimony for WLA on 2/18/2026 1:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Uilani Naipo	Individual	Support	In Person

Comments:

As in its title, State Parks Special Fund supports environmental protection projects and such projects are needed for many of our most heavily visited and used spaces of Hawaii. I support this measure.

COMMITTEE ON WATER, LAND, CULTURE AND THE ARTS

Senator Chris Lee, Chair
Senator Lorraine R. Inouye, Vice Chair
Wednesday, February 18, 2026, 1:01 PM
Conference Room 224 & Videoconference
State Capitol

Testimony of Curt Cottrell in opposition SB 2351

Aloha Chair Lee, Vice Chair Inouye and members of the committee, ***mahalo for the opportunity to testify in opposition to this measure.***

SB 2351 authorizes the Department of Land and Natural Resources to expend the money from the State Parks Special Fund for departmental programs aimed at environmental protection.

Section 1 is inaccurate. Special funds **may be used for environmental protection within a given park unit**. The statute precludes the use of these funds for other than park purposes. As an example, the Division of State Parks (DSP) is currently engaged in wildfire planning and mitigation at Diamond Head State Monument (DHSM) using a portion of DHSM revenue for this purpose. Other Park units will be in the queue for this critically needed action. Planning for sea level rise and its impact on coastal park units has been discussed and will be conducted.

DSP as a State program is in the Culture and Recreation bracket of the State Budget - not Environmental Protection. That is the purview of other programs. Section 2(5) amends the HRS to deploy State Park revenue for "departmental" programs, aimed at environmental protection which is contra to the current intent of Chapter 184 HRS.

Context for the opposition:

In 2006 DSP budget was a paltry 6 million - dominated by salary costs. Previous decades of budget reductions in both operating and salary depleted the labor force by over 25% and the lack of adequate operating funding have resulted in major backlog of statewide deferred maintenance. After decades of only having the option of CIP for routine and more comprehensive R&M due to lack of operating funds, DSP is now pivoting with this increased revenue to address deferred and new R&M and operating costs.

It is an unfortunate perception that after only a few Fiscal Years (FYs) of enhanced revenue generation that DSP may now be considered a "cash cow" after decades of systemic budget cuts and staff reduction due to economic pressures and a lack of support, and that this still new revenue generation is considered an option for other programs. For years, DSP attempted unsuccessfully to receive a greater and fair distribution of the TAT due to the obvious nexus of park units to the tourism industry. With advances in technology, and more robust public and private partnerships, there is now an effective and collaborative process to collect fees directly from visitors upon entry. The "old school" method of contracted staff collecting currency at the gate has been eliminated.

If the DSP special fund revenue stream is intact and not compromised by future pandemics, natural disasters or raids on its fund, the Division can be virtually self-funded - freeing up limited general funds and CIP for other DLNR programs unable to generate revenue. To ensure stable base budgeting, continued funding salary and utilities with general funds will ensure resiliency for DSP should future interruption to revenue occur.

It has only been a few FYs since the fee increase created the increased revenue stream, and DSP is still in the process of developing spending plans and innovative means of procuring contractors. In FY25 DSP did underspend within the current ceiling – but more time is needed to develop the contracts and methods to streamline the procurement process.

Think of it this way: *for decades DSP relied on scraps to operate a highly patronized, sought after and cherished park system, and now staff are learning how to manage a buffet of new funding – but they need bigger plates! The innovative means of contracting and re-thinking how R&M is conducted is underway.*

And in closing, DSP's ability and documented goal to now engage with community nonprofit collaboration and revenue sharing is due to the assurance of a special fund balance that covers R&M and operations - any additional diversions outside of the DSP program may compromise this new and positive co-management with our developing community partners from being successful.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in opposition to SB 2351.

LATE

SB-2351

Submitted on: 2/17/2026 1:03:08 PM

Testimony for WLA on 2/18/2026 1:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Chipper Wichman	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Lee, Vice Chair Inouye, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Chipper Wichman and I am **STRONGLY OPPOSED** to SB2351.

I am stongly opposed to this bill. The money generated in State Parks needs be used only in the State Park system and not more broadly within other DLNR programs. Please kill SB2351.

Aloha, Chipper