



Written Testimony before the Senate
Committee on Government Operations Committee

Thursday, Feb 5, 2026 (3:01 pm) Conference Room 225

RE: SB 2983 RELATING TO NATURAL RESOURCES.

Chair McKelvey, Vice Chair Gabbard and Members of the Senate Committee on Government Operations:

Trees for Honolulu's Future ("TFHF") is a nonprofit organization with a vision for a tree-filled island that preserves and enhances our quality of life, especially in the face of climate change.

TFHF supports the above-referenced Bill, which establishes the offense of criminal destruction of a tree on state or county property.

Trees create multiple benefits well documented by research. Trees create shade and use evapotranspiration to lower temperature. Trees also recharge groundwater and decrease surface runoff protecting our reefs. Trees trap pollutants and store CO2. Trees calm traffic. Sadly though, Honolulu has been losing urban tree canopy over the past years.

Some of this loss is intentional removal for a variety of reasons and individuals can debate whether a specific tree needs to be removed or not. What is NOT for debate, however, is protecting public property from malicious damage that results in a loss of a tree. It is indisputable that trees are valuable, and hardworking assets that provide myriad benefits to people and the environment. This bill ensures they have same protection as destruction of any other public property.

We urge passage of this bill onto the Committee on Judiciary for further consideration.

Sincerely,

Daniel Dinell
President

HONOLULU is HOT TREES are COOL

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Bill Number: SB2983
Bill Title: Relating to Natural Resources
Hawaii Resident

Aloha Chair McKelvey, Vice Chair Gabbard, and Members of the Committee,

I am an Army veteran, a current student at UH Manoa enrolled in the Natural Resources and Environmental Management program, and a resident of Hawaii. I have also volunteered for many programs that concern Hawaii's natural resources here on Oahu. We live in a region that is home to trees found nowhere else in the world. Many of Hawaii's trees are endemic, meaning once they are destroyed, they are gone forever. Because of this, these trees should be a top priority for protection and preservation. They are essential not only to Hawaii's environment but also to its culture and identity. Native trees provide critical habitat and food sources for many of Hawaii's endangered and also endemic birds and insects. Beyond supporting wildlife, trees directly benefit people by protecting watersheds, preventing erosion and excessive runoff, and helping maintain clean water sources. In urban areas, trees provide shade that cools temperatures and reduces the impacts of concrete-heavy development. They also supply food through fruits and nuts that have sustained communities for generations. Culturally, trees hold deep significance in Hawaii; historically, they were used to build wa'a (canoes) that carried Polynesian ancestors across the ocean to these islands. Protecting trees today is not just an environmental responsibility, but a way to honor Hawaii's history, culture, and future generations.

By making the intentional destruction of trees a criminal offense, SB2983 creates accountability and discourages illegal tree cutting on public lands. Reducing the loss of trees helps prevent erosion and flooding, which can otherwise lead to costly damage that impacts communities and taxpayers. These costs often include repairs to roads, drainage systems, and other public infrastructure. Protecting trees also improves public safety by stabilizing soil and reducing runoff, while preserving natural landscapes that make our cities more visually appealing for both residents and visitors.

For example, in areas such as Mānoa Valley on O'ahu, where steep slopes and heavy rainfall are common, the loss of trees and vegetation has contributed to increased runoff, erosion, and flooding during major rain events. These conditions have led to road damage, debris flows, and flooding that required public funds for cleanup, repairs, and emergency response. Situations like this demonstrate how the loss of trees directly affects community safety and increases costs for taxpayers.

For these reasons, I strongly support SB2983 and believe it is a necessary step to protect Hawaii's natural resources, public safety, and taxpayer dollars. I urge the legislature to pass this bill and help ensure that our public lands and trees are preserved for future generations. Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

SB-2983

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 12:27:01 PM

Testimony for GVO on 2/5/2026 3:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ted Bohlen	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

SUPPORT this bill's protection of trees, which tend to be valuable assets of State and counties.