



## **Native Hawaiians for TMT ask to join case; Group says Mauna Kea no more sacred than the rest of the island**

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The group formed the nonprofit Perpetuating Unique Educational Opportunities Inc. — known by its acronym PUEO, for the endemic owl of Hawaiian myth and legend — and filed a motion to intervene in the contested case currently underway.

The state Supreme Court ruled last year the state Board of Land and Natural Resources shouldn't have issued a permit to build the \$1.4 billion giant telescope on conservation land without first having a hearing to evaluate a petition challenging the project's approval. A June 17 hearing in Hilo is scheduled to determine who can participate.

Also asking to participate are some Native Hawaiians who oppose the project and the nonprofit corporation that wants to build it.

PUEO was formed "because so much press has been focused on a voice that Native Hawaiians were against science and technology on Mauna Kea," and to "recognize the importance of Hawaii's children to seek knowledge from all sources," according to a statement.

The group is led by Keahi Warfield, recently the moi kane, or king, of the 2016 Merrie Monarch Festival and an educator of Hawaiian youth who has an after-school canoe program in Keaukaha.

"If we don't come out and talk about it, who will?" Warfield said during an interview at the group's attorney's office Friday. "We know we're walking into a bull's-eye. We're doing it for the benefit of this island and the community as a whole."

Others include Patrick Kahawaiolaa, president of the Keaukaha Community Association; Wallace Ishibashi, East Hawaii commissioner on the Hawaiian Home Lands Commission; William Brown; and Richard Ha Jr.

Is Mauna Kea sacred as some Native Hawaiians claim?

"The whole island is sacred and Mauna Kea is part of it," Warfield said. "All land is sacred in Hawaii. It's not just one particular spot."

Even when land is considered sacred, that doesn't mean people can't use it, he said. PUEO's members say telescopes atop Mauna Kea won't diminish their culture because it provides youth of all cultures an opportunity to use modern-day tools to learn and explore their universe.

"I mean no disrespect for anyone's religious beliefs and cultural practices, but everybody has their own way of worshiping, and everyone is free to have and practice their own religious beliefs so long as they don't hurt anyone," said Brown in a declaration attached to the motion to intervene. "But I don't agree that we should oppose things like the TMT on Mauna Kea just because it's a modern thing, as Hawaiians have always been a creative and adaptive people."

Other groups see it differently, and others have different reasons for opposing the telescope.

One of those is Mehana Kihoi of Honaunau. She said other Hawaiians can do as they do, "if that's what moves them."

"It's not just because the land is sacred," Kihoi said. "It's a conservation area, it's the source of aquifers for the island's water."

The issue continues to be highly charged. Some 50 Hawaiians crowded a pre-hearing conference Monday in Honolulu, where hearings officer former Circuit Judge Riki May Amano set a schedule and deadlines. Opponents previously seeded the access road to the summit with rocks and staged demonstrations by blocking the road. Some continue waving signs on the mountain road.

Ishibashi, who also works as senior cultural adviser to the Office of Mauna Kea Management, said he's experienced his share of disparaging comments and even threats because he supports the telescopes. Education and jobs for the island's families continue to be his priorities, he said.

"It is difficult," Ishibashi said, "but I understand it's part of the job."