

State of Hawaii
DEPARTMENT OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES
Division of Aquatic Resources
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

September 22, 2017

Board of Land
and Natural Resources
Honolulu, Hawaii

SUBJECT: Request for Approval to Enter into a FY18 Special Funded Project Agreement (\$245,500) between the Board of Land and Natural Resources (BLNR) and The Research Corporation of the University of Hawaii (RCUH) for a Division of Aquatic Resources Research Project Titled “Development of Fast-Growing Native Hawaiian Corals”

Submitted herewith for your consideration is a request to enter into a Project Agreement between the BLNR and RCUH for a research project titled “Development of Fast-Growing Native Hawaiian Corals.” The initial 8-month project period will run from November 1, 2017 through June 30, 2018. The Project Agreement provides \$245,500 in Special Funds from the Department of Land and Natural Resources’ Division of Boating and Ocean Recreation (DOBOR). No State General Funds are being used. The BLNR/RCUH Project Agreement will allow the Division of Aquatic Resources (DAR) to utilize the services of RCUH to implement the project. RCUH’s assistance is required in order for DAR to meet project goals and objectives in a timely way.

This proposed multi-year project is to conduct research into developing fast-growing native Hawaiian coral colonies for outplanting on Hawaiian reefs to mitigate loss of native corals both within marine protected areas and in areas where unplanned impacts have occurred (large vessel groundings, etc.). The scope of services includes collection and evaluation of coral reef data, assessments of various coral habitats, collection and grow-out of coral fragments using the established DAR Fast-Growth coral protocols, maintenance of coral cultures/colonies, out-planting, monitoring, and related mitigation activities. The project coordinates activities of staff from RCUH, DAR, DOBOR, and various Federal and State partner agencies.

The primary goal of the project is to acquire and grow-out corals recovered from Hawaii’s small boat harbors as source material for mitigation purposes, i.e. to restore important Hawaiian reef ecosystems on the island of Oahu. Activities will build upon previous work conducted at the Division of Aquatic Resources’ (DAR) Coral Restoration Nursery (CRN) located at Anuenue Fisheries Research Center (AFRC), on Sand Island, Oahu.

Currently, a thousand or more coral colonies, including 24 species of extremely rare Hawaiian corals, are housed at the CRN. Success to-date has resulted in the ability to take a 10 cm fragment of living coral and produce within 8 months, a 40 cm+ living coral colony. Normally,

the natural growth rate of these Hawaiian corals would take two decades or more in the wild. This project will strive to improve laboratory measures to minimize grow-out time while maximizing the health and fitness of the coral, and thus, produce increased numbers of native Hawaiian coral colonies for outplanting while minimizing both biosecurity and aquatic invasive species (AIS) concerns.

This major pro-active project directly addresses and strives to mitigate adverse human impacts to Hawaii's increasingly threatened natural, and often endemic, coral reefs. Outplanting of CRN-grown corals will help restore the natural reef coral assemblages in marine protected areas and highly impacted coral reef sites. Furthermore, these restorative measures are directly applicable to the Governor's 30/30 initiative for better management of Hawaii's marine waters.

Approval to enter into the Project Agreement is being requested concurrently from the Governor, through the Department of Budget and Finance. Also, the Project Agreement is currently being prepared for submission to the Attorney General's Office for approval as to form. DAR is aware that implementation of the Project Agreement is dependent upon receipt of all required approvals and the availability of funds, and that funding restrictions may occur at any time.

Chapter 343 - Compliance with Environmental Law:

This project involves the use of state lands (submerged lands zoned in the Conservation District, Resource subzone), and the use of state funds. The Department has determined that the actions undertaken by this ongoing project will have little or no significant effect on the environment and are exempt from the preparation of an environmental assessment. See Agency's Determination of Exemption (attached) from preparation of an environmental assessment.

RECOMMENDATION:

Based on the attached proposed declaration of exemption prepared by the Department after consultation with and advice of those having jurisdiction and expertise for the proposed actions under the contract:

1. That upon the finding and adoption of the department's analysis, the Board declares that the actions which are anticipated to be undertaken under this project will have little or no significant effect on the environment, and is therefore exempt from the preparation of an environmental assessment.
2. That the Board approves the declaration of exemption for purposes of recordkeeping requirements of Chapter 343, HRS, and Chapter 11-200, HAR.


3. That the Board authorizes the Chairperson to negotiate and, subject to necessary approvals, enter into a new Project Agreement with The Research Corporation of the University of Hawaii for a Division of Aquatic Resources research project titled "Development of Fast-Growing Native Hawaiian Corals."

Respectfully submitted,



BRUCE S. ANDERSON, Ph.D.
Administrator

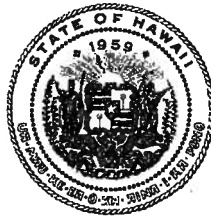
APPROVED FOR SUBMITTAL:



SUZANNE D. CASE
Chairperson

Attachment

DAVID Y. IGE
GOVERNOR OF
HAWAII



STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES

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CHAIRPERSON
BOARD OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES
COMMISSION ON WATER RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

ROBERT K. MASUDA
FIRST DEPUTY


JEFFREY T. PEARSON, P.E.
DEPUTY DIRECTOR - WATER

AQUATIC RESOURCES
BOATING AND OCEAN RECREATION
BUREAU OF CONVEYANCES
COMMISSION ON WATER RESOURCE MANAGEMENT
CONSERVATION AND COASTAL LANDS
CONSERVATION AND RESOURCES ENFORCEMENT
ENGINEERING
FORESTRY AND WILDLIFE
HISTORIC PRESERVATION
KAHOOLAWE ISLAND RESERVE COMMISSION
LAND
STATE PARKS

September 22, 2017

TO: Division of Aquatic Resources File

THROUGH: Suzanne D. Case, Chairperson

FROM: Bruce S. Anderson, PhD and Administrator 
Division of Aquatic Resources

SUBJECT: Declaration of Exemption from the Preparation of an Environmental Assessment under the Authority of Chapter 343, HRS, and Chapter 11-200, HAR, for a Request for Approval to Enter into a FY18 Special Funded Project Agreement (\$245,500) between the Board of Land and Natural Resources (BLNR) and The Research Corporation of the University of Hawaii (RCUH) for a Division of Aquatic Resources Research Project Titled "Development of Fast-Growing Native Hawaiian Corals"

The following project activities are found to be exempted from preparation of an environmental assessment under the authority of Chapter 343, Hawaii Revised Statutes (HRS) and Chapter 11-200, Hawaii Administrative Rules (HAR):

Project Title: Development of Fast-Growing Native Hawaiian Corals

Request for Approval to Enter into a FY18 Special Funded Project Agreement (\$245,500) between the Board of Land and Natural Resources (BLNR) and The Research Corporation of the University of Hawaii (RCUH) for a Division of Aquatic Resources Research Project Titled "Development of Fast-Growing Native Hawaiian Corals"

Project Description: This project is to conduct research into developing fast-growing native Hawaiian corals for outplanting on Hawaiian reefs to mitigate loss of native corals both within marine protected areas and in areas where unplanned impacts have occurred (large vessel groundings, etc.). The scope of services includes collection and evaluation of coral reef data, assessments of various coral habitats, collection and grow-out of coral fragments using the established DAR Fast-Growth coral protocols, maintenance of coral cultures/colonies, out-

planting, monitoring, and related mitigation activities. The project coordinates activities of staff from RCUH, DAR, DOBOR, and various Federal and State partner agencies.

The primary goal of the project is to acquire and grow-out corals recovered from Hawaii's small boat harbors as source material for mitigation purposes, i.e. to restore important Hawaiian reef ecosystems on the island of Oahu. Activities will build upon previous work conducted at the Division of Aquatic Resources' (DAR) Coral Restoration Nursery (CRN) located at Anuenue Fisheries Research Center (AFRC), on Sand Island, Oahu.

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Exemption Determination: After reviewing §11-200-8, HAR, including the criteria used to determine significance under §§11-200-1 and 5, HAR, DLNR has concluded that the activities under this project would have no significant effect on the environment and that approval of the project/project agreement is categorically exempt from the requirement to prepare an environmental assessment based on the following analysis:

1. All activities associated with this project have been evaluated as a single action. Since this research project involves activities that are precedent to a later planned activity, i.e., the monitoring and collection of data and research, the categorical exemption determination here will treat all planned activities as a single action under § 11-200-8, HAR.
2. The Exemption Class #5 or Scientific Research with no Serious or Major Environmental Disturbance Appears to Apply. §11-200-8(a)(5), HAR, exempts the class of actions that involve "basic data collection, research, experimental management, and resource evaluation activities which do not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource." This exemption class has been interpreted to include the data collection, research and resource evaluation activities related to estuarine habitats, such as those being proposed.

The proposed activities here appear to fall squarely under the exemption class identified under §11-200-8(a)(5), HAR, and as described under the 2015 DLNR exemption list class #5, item #2, #14 and #15. As discussed below, no significant disturbance to any environmental resource is anticipated. Thus, so long as the below considerations are met, an exemption class should include the action now contemplated.

3. Cumulative Impacts of Actions in the Same Place and Impacts with Respect to the Potentially Particularly Sensitive Environment Will Not Be Significant. Even where a categorical exemption appears to include a proposed action, the action cannot be declared exempt if "the cumulative impact of planned successive actions in the same place, over time, is significant, or when an action that is normally insignificant in its impact on the environment may be significant in a particularly sensitive environment." §11-200-8(b), HAR.

To gauge whether a significant impact or effect is probable, an exempting agency must consider every phase of a proposed action, any expected primary and secondary consequences, the long-term and short-term effects of the action, the overall and cumulative effect of the action, and the sum effects of an action on the quality of the environment. §11-200-12, HAR.

Significant cumulative impacts are not anticipated as a result of this activity, and numerous safeguards further ensure that the potentially sensitive environment of the project area will not be significantly affected. All activities will be conducted in a manner that does not diminish marine resources, qualities, and ecological integrity, or have any indirect, secondary, cultural, or cumulative effects.

Since no significant cumulative impacts or significant impacts with respect to any particularly sensitive aspect of the project area are anticipated, the categorical exemptions identified above should remain applicable.

4. Overall Impacts will Probably have No Significant Effect on the Environment. Any foreseeable impacts from the proposed activity will be further mitigated by general and specific conditions attached to the project. Specifically, all research activities covered by this project will be carried out with strict safeguards for the natural, historic, and cultural resources, other applicable law and agency policies and standard operating procedures.

Conclusion: Upon consideration of the project to be approved by the Chairperson, being delegated signatory authority on behalf of the Board of Land and Natural Resources at its meeting of September 22, 2017, the potential effects of the above listed project as provided by Chapter 343, HRS, and Chapter 11-200, HAR, have been determined to be of little or no significant effect on the environment and exempt from the preparation of an environmental assessment.