

Testimony of The Nature Conservancy

In Support of Agenda Item C-4, "Authorization of funding for the Nature Conservancy for \$965,197 during FY 25-30 for continued enrollment in the Natural Area Partnership Program and acceptance and approval of the Ka'ū Preserve long range management plan, Tax Map Keys 3-9-7-001:002, 003, 004, 007, Hawaii."

**Hawai'i Board of Land and Natural Resources
December 7, 2023, 9:15 AM
Kalanimoku Building, 1151 Punchbowl St., Room 132**

Aloha Chair Chang and Board Members:

As Director of The Nature Conservancy's (TNC) Hawai'i Island Forest Program, I am writing in support of Agenda Item C-4, the proposed Ka'ū Preserve Natural Area Partnership Program FY25 to FY30 Long Range Management Plan submitted to the Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR). Continued funding of TNC's active management of Ka'ū Preserve is critical to maintaining the health and resilience of these watersheds. **We ask the Board to approve the proposal.**

The State's Natural Area Partnership Program (NAPP) is an innovative program that aids private landowners in the management of their native ecosystems. The Ka'ū Preserve NAPP was established in 2007 and TNC is seeking reauthorization of NAPP funding for the next six-year period for the programs described within this Ka'ū Preserve FY2025–FY2030 Long-Range Management Plan. This plan continues the programs implemented under the previous plans and Environmental Assessment. Our forest conservation priorities at Ka'ū Preserve are to:

- 1) protect Hawai'i's remaining native forests and ensure they are managed as functioning watersheds and habitat for native species that are resilient to climate change;
- 2) address the threats that invasive species pose to their health, our economy and way of life;
- 3) develop, pilot, and/or standardize innovative tools and technologies to make conservation work more efficient; and
- 4) ensure community access to and benefit from the Ka'ū Forest Reserve.

Activities covered under this long-range plan will focus on: maintaining zero levels of ungulates across the Preserve; maintaining the eight miles of fences built in 2008 and 2016, other fences, and gully and gulch barriers; invasive plant mapping and control; threat and resource monitoring; support for partner surveys and monitoring; improvements and utilization of innovation for management; and infrastructure maintenance (workshop and remote camp facilities, landings zones and trails).

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Over the last five years of our NAPP partnership, we have made substantial progress. Some highlights include: the Kaiholena management area of Ka'ū Preserve is protected from ungulates by two fence units, Maka'ālia (mauka) and Kaiholena (makai). The 8 miles of fences protecting 2,000-acres of lowland wet, montane and wet cliff ecosystems from feral pigs, sheep and cattle have effectively slowed the spread of Rapid 'Ōhi'a Death in the fenced area, with 1.5 miles of fence replaced with the support of DLNR in the past 5 years. Populations of endangered tree species are protected from predation by rats, increasing recruitment and seed availability for nursery propagation and out-planting. Ten research projects were facilitated, and 1,084 primarily school-aged members of the public were educated on the importance of watershed protection and conservation of the lands and waters on which all life in Hawai'i depends.

Continued support of this project will benefit the populations of native flora and fauna that depend on healthy lowland to montane wet 'ōhi'a forests in the Ka'ū forest belt. It will also benefit a population of approximately 8,850 people in Ka'ū who rely on these forests for fresh water and erosion control. Watershed conservation activities at Ka'ū Preserve protect an estimated 180 million gallons of freshwater yield from the time of fence establishment until 2065 (UHERO, 2015).

To support these efforts, we ask that the Board support and approve the Long-Range Management Plan and funding recommended by DLNR. Mahalo for your support and stewardship of Hawai'i's natural resources.

Sincerely,



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