

A scenic photograph of a sunset over a mountain range. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright lens flare that radiates across the sky. The sky is filled with soft, orange and yellow clouds. In the foreground, the dark, silty slopes of a mountain are visible. The overall mood is serene and majestic.

University of Hawai'i Institute for Astronomy

Doug Simons, IfA Director



From My October 2025 Presentation...

Hawai'i State Astronomy Program

Origins &

Photo: Bo Reipurth



The Hawai'i State Astronomy Program

- * In exchange for providing Maunakea observatories sponsored by those governments, the State of Hawai'i was creating a program that broadly benefited the people of Hawai'i
- * Same model used elsewhere, e.g., Chile
- * *That State program is hosted by UH* creating a program that broadly benefited the people of Hawai'i



SCR16 → Act 255

- * "Astronomy...is a policy of the State of Hawai'i" restatement of SCR16 approved decades ago broader vision for Hawai'i engaging the world leading the world
- * Central to this policy is the intended benefit of an astronomy program for everyone in Hawai'i
- * To date most of that benefit has gone to Maui, and Hawai'i Island, though more is opening...



IfA – A Multi-island Program

- * Beyond the enormous logistical, programmatic, and legal challenges of consolidating the Hawaii State astronomy program into one site, it seems prudent to first ask would such a change be consistent with the vision behind the origins of the State's program?
 - * A major facility move would require high-level approvals within UH, faculty endorsement for change of tenure locus, new facilities, funding, etc.
- * Through various initiatives, the State's astronomy program has naturally expanded across several islands – should we promote multi-island growth or consolidation in the future?
 - * Over its ~50 years as a UH program, IfA has opened base facilities on Oahu (Mānoa), Maui (Pukalani) and Hawai'i Island (Hilo) and integrated them into one program
- * In the end perhaps it comes down to who should benefit and whose vision should we follow...



Act 255 Directive to MKSOA Regarding IfA's Location

Approved by the Governor
on JUL 07 2022
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
THIRTY-FIRST LEGISLATURE, 2022
STATE OF HAWAII

ORIGINAL

ACT 255
H.B. NO. 2024
H.D. 1
S.D. 2
C.D. 1

A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO MAUNA KEA.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF HAWAII:

1 PART I

2 SECTION 1. The purpose of this Act is to establish the
3 Mauna Kea stewardship and oversight authority and a transition
4 and governance structure for the management of Mauna Kea lands.

5 SECTION 2. The Hawaii Revised Statutes is amended by
6 adding a new chapter to be appropriately designated and to read
7 as follows:

8 "CHAPTER

9 MAUNA KEA STEWARDSHIP AND OVERSIGHT AUTHORITY

10 § -1 Findings and purpose. The legislature finds that
11 Mauna Kea serves as an important cultural and genealogical site
12 to the people of Hawaii, particularly to Native Hawaiians. The
13 summit region of Mauna Kea is a spiritual and special place of
14 significance that is home to cultural landscapes, fragile
15 habitats, and historical and archaeological artifacts. Due to
16 its topographical prominence, Mauna Kea is also a highly valued
17 site for astronomical study, which produces many significant
18 discoveries that contribute to humanity's study and

HB2024 CD1 LRB 22-2038-10.doc



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- * The task before MKSOA is to advise on whether IfA should be moved to UH Hilo
- * For the purposes of this analysis it is assumed that “relocated” means moving both IfA-Mānoa and IfA-Maui to UH-Hilo, where IfA-Hilo is located

(2) Conduct an assessment on whether the University of Hawaii school of astronomy should be relocated, in whole or in part, to the University of Hawaii at Hilo; and



UH Institute for Astronomy – 3 Islands, 1 Program



IfA-Mānoa

51,000 sf, core of IfA's education and research program; ~100 people; functions under College of Natural Sciences, Physics & Astronomy; undergrad astronomy program (~100 students) exclusively based at UH Mānoa



IfA-Hilo

36,000 sf, used for observatory operations, MKSS/CMS, faculty, students, tech-dev; ~60 people



IfA-Maui

15,000 sf with extensive lab space, houses much of IfA's solar research group, PanSTARRS and ATLAS operations teams, next to DKIST office in Pukalani; ~30 people



Various Considerations for Such a Move...

- * Flagship nature of UH Mānoa leads to extensive cross-discipline research and education opportunities for IfA faculty and students – essentially impossible to replicate at UH Hilo
 - * Extensive computing resources needed by IfA only available at UH Mānoa
- * Many faculty, staff, and students are not in a position to move due to personal factors including family, spousal employment, housing, children in schools, etc.
- * Moving everyone from IfA-Mānoa and IfA-Maui to IfA-Hilo requires an additional ~65,000 sf of space on the UH Hilo campus
 - * Current cost is ~\$2000/sf so >\$100M in additional facilities on UH Hilo campus - ROI probably measured in decades



Various Considerations for Such a Move...

- ✳ Locating all IfA facilities at UH-Hilo means moving, financing, building and probably reorganizing IfA on a transformative scale
- ✳ An initial step would involve moving the locus of tenure for faculty, as part of a “Transfer of Programs” within UH
 - ✳ Per existing agreements, faculty engaged in the program shall have the right of first refusal to appointment in the program at another campus, with the option of seeking appointments elsewhere across UH
 - ✳ *With upwards of ~30 faculty potentially relocating, such a move would be extremely disruptive to IfA’s research, education, and technology programs, and take many years to execute and recover from*



Various Considerations for Such a Move...

- ✦ Likely that, at a minimum, consultations with employee unions (UHPA as well as HGEA for APT employees) would be needed - a complex and time consuming process as this would be a major move with significant impact on employees
- ✦ Likely that UH Hilo would need to execute a formal re-org to incorporate IfA, consistent with UH Regents policies
- ✦ Legal considerations may also arise including Article X Section 6 of the Hawai'i Constitution
 - ✦ Grants UH "constitutional autonomy" and provides for the BOR to have "exclusive jurisdiction over the internal structure, management, and operation of the university."
 - ✦ Degree and academic changes would likely require approval, or at minimum coordination and review by UH's accrediting agency, WASC. In addition Board of Regents, University leadership and faculty and administrator review and involvement would be required



Various Considerations for Such a Move...

- * UH Hilo administrative infrastructure and capacity needed to support IfA would need to be augmented
- * Legislature would need to approve the move given budget implications for IfA
- * IfA already extensively collaborates with the UH Hilo astronomy program, including teaching and outreach – consideration of cross-program relationships/roles would be needed
- * Undergraduate astronomy degree program offered at UH Mānoa would need to be transferred to UH Hilo, noting 300+ Mānoa undergrads take intro astronomy classes now

Closing Comments

- ✳️ In my October 2025 presentation I described various benefits to the State stemming from a distributed IfA
- ✳️ Over the past 50+ years, the “center of gravity” in Hawai‘i astronomy has shifted south, and that momentum remains today
- ✳️ If the intent of moving IfA to Hilo is to increase the benefits of astronomy on Hawai‘i Island, riding the “wave” that already exists will achieve much of that over time, with far fewer adverse consequences...



Mahalo

Maunakea Forest Reserve (~8000 ft elevation)