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HB 654 NATURAL AREA RESERVES SYSTEM

Statement for
House Committee on
Planning, Energy and Environmental Protection
Water, Land Use, Development and Hawaiian Affairs
Public Hearing - February 26, 1987

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HB 654 would establish three new sections to HRS 195 that would (1) require natural area reserves to be held in public trust; (2) require the preparation of a reserve system management plan; and (3) require the preparation of an annual report. Our statement on this bill does not reflect an institutional position of the University of Hawaii.

The restriction that natural area reserves are to be held in trust and not be alienated except to another public use may restrict or eliminate the ability of the state to conduct land swaps of reserve system lands with private individuals even when there is a clear advantage to do so. For example, the exchange of Campbell Estate land with the state land at Kahaualea, Hawaii would not be permissible under this legislation. If a piece of pristine private land becomes available, the state should be given the option to negotiate a land swap providing of course that there are valid scientific and environmental reasons for the exchange.

We concur that the development of a comprehensive reserves system management plan is an appropriate requirement and certainly essential to informed management. The language of the amendment, however, suggests that the basis of the plan is to be limited to available "scientific data on the communities of the natural flora and fauna of Hawaii." We suggest that a good management plan is predicated on a number of issues not only the diversity of native species. The threats, both present and future, to the species and ecosystem, feasibility of management options, and sources of similar resources are but a few of the topics that should be considered. In our opinion, the amendment would be strengthened by deleting line 9-11 of page 1 and replacement with:

The Department shall prepare a comprehensive reserves system management plan based upon such information as is needed to accomplish the purposes of this chapter.

The directive provided on page 7, paragraph 9, suffers from two problems. It may be in some cases too limited and in others too general. For example, as drafted use of a single compilation source is prescribed. However, in some instances multiple sources of comprehensive data may be available and should be considered by the commission. On the other hand, if the commission already has a comprehensive scientific evaluation of an area, the language of HB 654 may require the commission to go to another (outside) databank for yet another compilation.