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HB 438 RELATING TO WATERSHED MANAGEMENT

House Committee on Water and Land Use

**Public Hearing, February 9, 1999
9:00 a.m., Room 312, State Capitol**

By
John Harrison, Environmental Center
David Duffy, Botany, PCSU
David Penn, Environmental Center
Clifford Smith, Botany, PCSU

HB 438 would amend Chapter 174C, HRS, to create a watershed protection trust fund.

Our comments on this measure are compiled from voluntarily submitted opinions of the listed academic sources, and as such, do not constitute an institutional position of the University of Hawaii.

Given that water resources by law are held in trust for the people by government, a compelling argument may be made for all source development projects to be treated as water leases under existing statutes. The present measure seems to address this in a roundabout way by proposing a "surcharge on domestic water use". However, the designation of who is charged and how much is left to the counties. In the present economic climate, initiation of a new fee along these lines by the counties is not likely to be well received by the people. Hence, we have doubts as to the ability of the proposed management trust fund to achieve a reliable source of income, since it's not clear that federal funding for such an instrument is allowed.

Ultimately, management of watersheds is a critical need, and the invention of mechanisms like this to fund these needs underscores the deplorable condition of state funding for natural resource management. Hawaii spends \$60 million to market its visitor industry, but only \$27 million of state general funds are allocated to the management of the resources that visitors come to see. Our children and their children will have ample cause to question our funding priorities.