HR 155 HCR 146
REQUESTING THE DEPARTMENT OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES TO TAKE IMMEDIATE ACTION ON THE LEASE OF PU'UWA'A'WA'A

Statement for
House Committee on
Water, Land Use and Hawaiian Affairs
Health
Intergovernmental Relations and International Affairs
Public Hearing - April 5, 1991

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HR 155 and HCR 146 call attention to serious deficiencies in the management of certain leased lands at Pu'uwa'aw'a on the Big Island by the Division of Land Management of the Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR). The resolutions call for the Board of Land and Natural Resources (BLNR) to take immediate action to amend the lease and for the DLNR to provide a report to the 1992 legislature and future plans to protect what remains of the dryland lana-kauwila forest. The Legislative Auditor is also requested to review the financial arrangements of the lease and the conduct of the Division of Land Management (DIM) with respect to this lease and enforcement of its terms.

Our statement on this resolution does not represent an institutional position of the University of Hawaii.

The Department of Land and Natural Resources through it's Division of Land Management (DIM) is mandated to manage state lands to the benefit of the general public. From time-to-time it is recognized that an economic benefit can be derived from the lease of some state land. However, in those cases the terms of the lease must be drawn so as to preserve and protect the value of the land. Once a lease is negotiated, it is the responsibility of the DIM to enforce the terms. Failure to do so is a dereliction of duty.

At Pu'uwa'awa'i this seems to be the case. The land there has high
intrinsic biological value as a unique ecosystem. It was one of the best examples of Hawaiian dry land forest and it provided habitat for the endangered Hawaiian crow, 'Alala (*Corvus hawaiiensis*) and various endangered plant species. The land was of sufficient biological value that parts of the area leased were under consideration for inclusion as a Natural Area Reserve. Modifications made to the land combined with the recent fires (of unexplained origin) have significantly damaged the present ecosystem but the intrinsic value of the land, its climate, rainfall, topography and soils remain ready for re-forestation efforts given proper management.

This area also contained one of the two remaining habitats known to support the endangered 'Alala which the state is now attempting to save from extinction with a captive breeding program. Because the only other site where the 'Alala still exists in the wild is under private ownership, protection of that habitat is extremely difficult. Rehabilitating portions of the state owned Pu'ula'awa'a land would provide the much needed habitat to support the eventual release of captive bred 'Alala. Given the present condition of this forest, it is apparent that time is of the essence for reforestation efforts if the ecosystem is to be restored to a sufficient growth level to again support the crow.

We strongly concur with the various resolves of these resolutions. In particular, we urge that all leased areas previously identified as appropriate for inclusion in the Natural Area Reserve system be withdrawn and placed immediately under the NARS program.