

November 6, 2008

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Improving the Draft Maui Island Plan to achieve the Goal of Protecting Coral Reefs and other Natural Resources.

Dear Mr. Hunt:

We have reviewed the draft Maui Island Plan (Draft Plan) for policy and implementation content regarding the protection of Maui's coral reefs and other natural resources. We commend the Draft Plan for its candid assessment that Maui's coastal ecosystems are threatened, that reefs face dramatic, irreversible losses, and that the existing regulatory framework is inadequate to protect them.

The Draft Plan clearly states intent to protect coastal resources. However, as currently written, it lacks the direction and specificity needed to achieve that goal. For example, while referring to several state-wide conservation plans, it fails to provide specific strategies for their implementation on Maui. By contrast, the Draft Plan's "Directed Growth Strategy" provides specific information across Maui on the planned location and character of development which could further harm our coastal ecosystems.

Maui urgently needs an integrated "conservation & development plan" to successfully protect its coral reefs and other natural resources. Unfortunately, the Draft Plan appears to approve development without offering a concrete program to prevent damage to coastal ecosystems.

Please consider our specific comments and recommendations for improving the Maui Island Plan:

Implementation of Existing Conservation Plans

1. Coastal Non-Point Pollution Control Program Management Plan (June 1996) and the Implementation Plan for Polluted Runoff Control (July 2000). The Draft Plan notes that these documents offer a comprehensive state-wide strategy to prevent and reduce polluted runoff from agriculture, forestry, urbanization, marinas and recreational boating, and other factors. We recommend an immediate evaluation of this strategy's application on Maui to date, and a determination as to the extent to which coastal waters have been protected from polluted runoff. The Final Plan can then outline policy, institutional, financial, and technical plans for further addressing the problem.

2. Beach Management Plan for Maui (BMP). The Draft Plan calls for BMP implementation through “changes to existing land use policies, rules and regulations, and the establishment of new programs and partnerships.” These “changes” need to be specified along with plans for new programs and partnerships. BMP recommendations include designation of special beach management areas and districts, promotion of Beach Nourishment and Dune Preservation, purchase of Critical Coastal Lands, Inter-agency Coordination, and Integrated Coastal Zone Management. The Draft Plan should indicate what conservation designations and measures are planned, and where.

3. Hawaii Ocean Resource Management Plan (ORMP)

The Draft Plan supports the Ocean Resources Management Plan’s call for a change in approach to natural resources management. It states:

Our current sector-based approach is not adequate...despite the ongoing and substantive efforts of government agencies, nongovernmental organizations, private sector, communities, and individuals. Existing plans and programs are developed and implemented primarily by state and local government to manage individual resources. Community goals for area development and resource use are difficult to incorporate. As a result, management efforts are fragmented, with gaps and overlaps in implementation. The ORMP sets forth guiding principles and recommendations for the State of Hawaii to achieve comprehensive and integrated ocean and coastal resources management.

The State Legislature adopted the ORMP and passed legislation that incorporated the plan into the Hawai’i Coastal Zone Management Program (HCZMP). As such, incorporation of the ORMP into General, Island and Community Plans is critical to its successful implementation (our emphasis).

We suggest that the Maui Island Plan offer a “comprehensive and integrated ocean and coastal resources management” plan for Maui. This should include actions to prevent land-based pollution of coastal waters (sediment and nutrient discharge), damage to coral reefs from commercial and recreational activities, and overfishing (which results in excessive algal growth and coral decline).

Maui Island Plan: Goals and Actions

The Draft Plan lists goals and actions related to coral reefs and coastal resources. Among them:

Land-Based Pollution

Goal 2.3.4 Seek to reduce contaminants from impervious surfaces, runoff, and all injection wells entering marine ecosystems.

The vague phrasing “seek to reduce contaminants” is an inadequate goal for the Maui Island Plan. Quantified goals to protect resources are needed, along with clear technical and financial strategies for achieving them.

Before finalizing the Plan, we urge that a scientific assessment be conducted of contaminant impacts on Maui's marine ecosystems, related to current and anticipated development. An expert panel should be immediately convened for this purpose. The County should not assume *a priori* that additional development can proceed while simultaneously achieving pollution reduction goals. A scientifically-based evaluation is needed to determine how much a reduction in contaminants is necessary and where. A pollution monitoring program also needs to be established under the Final Plan.

Regarding suspended solids, the technical report accompanying the Draft Plan calls for a reduction to predevelopment levels. This recommendation was not, however, adopted as a goal in the Draft Plan.

2.4-Action-4 Work with private landowners to set voluntary goals for the total amount of nutrients that enter watersheds and encourage the reduction of landscape fertilizers and pesticides.

Goals for pollution reduction need to reflect environmental protection needs, and plans to mobilize voluntary participation for attaining them specified in the Final Plan. However, regulatory measures also need to be described the Plan, as they may be needed to achieve pollution abatement goals.

2.4-Action-1 Conservation Subdivision Design Plans and the incorporation of Low Impact Development Techniques may be required of new subdivisions and developments that are proximate to environmentally sensitive watershed resources.

Development near sensitive watershed resources should not be approved unless site specific analysis clearly shows that environmental damage can be avoided through conservation design plans and low impact development techniques.

The Maui Island Plan should not assume that conservation design plans and mitigation techniques will necessarily work for any given area. The Plan should require site-specific analysis of environmental factors and the feasibility (cost, effectiveness, etc.) of avoiding watershed damage prior to development approval. Once this work is completed, a decision can then be made on whether a development should be approved, and if so with what, if any, conservation and low impact requirements.

Coral Reef Protection

Goal 2.3.5 Identify adversely impacted reef areas and mitigate the negative effects of upland uses on coastal wetlands and coral reefs.

Many damaged and threatened reef areas are already known, and should be mapped and identified in the Final Plan. The Plan should indicate how much mitigation is needed to safeguard coastal wetlands and coral reefs, who will carry it out, where and how it will be done, on what timetable, and with what resources.

Goal 2.3.6 Coordinate with appropriate agencies to implement reef restoration activities.

The Maui Island Plan should summarize available information and expert opinion on the feasibility of restoring damaged or destroyed coral reefs. We suggest that prevention is by far the better option.

As it stands, the goal of “coordinating with appropriate agencies” is too vague to be of much value. Please elaborate, indicating the objectives of such coordination, the agencies that will be involved, and how coordination will be accomplished.

Overuse of marine resources

Goal 2.3.7 Work with appropriate agencies to protect Ahihi-Kinaiu, Honolua Bay, and Makena State Park from overuse.

Protecting coral reefs and near shore ecosystems from overuse must include other coastal areas as well. The Final Plan should identify and map all areas where special measures are needed to prevent overfishing and other adverse impacts. Regulatory and enforcement mechanisms to protect against overfishing and resulting reef damage should be described and evaluated in the Final Plan, and plans for improving these mechanisms presented. Clearly, a more comprehensive approach is needed to protect Maui’s coral reefs given that existing measures have failed, and considering increased fishing demand and recreational use of reef areas anticipated with further human population growth and development. The Plan should include recommendations for additional on and off-shore protected areas.

Shoreline hardening/excessive extraction of dune sand

2.3.1 Discourage artificial hardening of Maui Island’s shoreline even as the sea level rises and the shore retreats inland

2.3.2 Limit extraction of the island’s sand from beaches and nearby dunes and promote beach nourishment activities.

Terms such as “discourage” and “limit” are too vague to help resolve serious environmental problems. Citizens and businesses need to know where hardening and extraction activities are allowed and where they are not. The “rules” should be based on the best science available and backed by a formal technical report on the problem.

Protection and Restoration of Endangered Species

We recommend that the Maui Island Plan outline plans for working with state and federal agencies and with the private sector to address the endangered species crisis on Maui. Federally listed endangered species on the Island include 83 plants and 20 animals. Many other species on Maui appear on the State list of “Species of Greatest Conservation Concern” (Hawaii’s Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy 2005).

The Maui Island Plan should incorporate an island-wide conservation plan that can prevent further species extinctions and facilitate recovery of Maui's native flora and fauna. The Plan should include maps showing in general terms the distribution of endangered and declining species. These maps would provide a geographic reference for county conservation initiatives and help alert land managers and users to the potential presence of these species.

2.5-Action-1 Require flora and fauna assessments for development in areas with medium, high, and very high concentrations of threatened and endangered species.

Concentrations of endangered species can help guide implementation of an assessment program. However, assessments need to target individual species in danger of extinction or population decline. Development should avoid areas essential to the conservation and recovery of these species, unless proven conservation measures are available. Such measures need to be agreed upon prior to approval of new developments in areas where endangered species may occur.

Climate Change Abatement

We urge that the Maui Island Plan provide a framework for reducing the Island's greenhouse gas "footprint," promoting renewable energy production, energy use efficiency, transportation, reforestation, sustainable agriculture, and planned low-emissions development. Maui is especially vulnerable to the impacts of the global climate crisis, with changing weather patterns, higher ocean temperatures, increased seawater acidity, and sea level rise. The Maui Island Plan should reflect a strong commitment and timetable for significantly reducing our net production of greenhouse gas emissions.

Conclusion: The Draft Maui Island Plan does not currently provide the direction and specificity needed to achieve its conservation goals. We are eager to help Maui County, its Planning Department, and the General Plan Action Committee in preparing a Final Plan to safeguard our precious coral reefs and other natural resources. Maui County should seize the opportunity to join other progressive counties in the United States in providing leadership for protecting nature and the environment. (For example, please see the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan of Pima County, Arizona at <http://www.pima.gov/cmo/sdcp/>).

Please contact us to arrange a meeting to discuss our recommendations (summarized below). We appreciate this opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

/s/

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/s/

C. Dustin Becker, Ph.D.
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/s/

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G. Riki Hokama, Chair
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General Plan Advisory Committee

Summary of Recommendations for the Maui Island Plan

1. Evaluate current pollution control programs on Maui, determining why the goal of protecting coastal waters from land-based pollution has not been achieved.
2. Immediately convene an expert panel to complete a scientific assessment of contaminant impacts on Maui's marine ecosystems. Map threatened coral reef areas, and provide information on the feasibility of restoring damaged or destroyed coral reefs.
3. Develop measurable goals for pollution abatement and protection of coastal ecosystems, with clear technical and financial strategies for achieving them.
4. Outline an overall program for pollution abatement, including plans to mobilize voluntary participation, regulatory measures, and pollution monitoring. Provide information on planned coordination among key participants, methods, locations, timetables, and required resources.

5. Provide a specific strategy for improved implementation of state-wide plans to protect coastal resources, indicating necessary policy, programmatic, institutional, financial, and technical changes.
6. Incorporate plans for comprehensive ocean and coastal resources management, consistent with the Hawaii Ocean Resource Management Plan, including measures to prevent land-based pollution of coastal waters, damage to coral reefs from commercial and recreational activities, and overfishing.
7. Specify changes to existing land use policies, rules and regulations, and the establishment of new programs and partnerships under the Beach Management Plan.
8. Disallow development near sensitive watershed resources unless site specific analysis demonstrates that environmental damage can be avoided through conservation design plans and low impact development techniques.
9. Identify and map coastal areas where special measures are needed to prevent overfishing and other adverse impacts. Include recommendations for additional on- and off-shore protected areas.
10. Evaluate current fishing regulations and enforcement, and indicate improvements needed and plans to prevent overfishing and reef damage.
11. Determine where artificial hardening of shoreline and extraction of sand from beaches and dunes should not be allowed for environmental reasons, and indicate appropriate regulations and enforcement.
12. Outline specific plans for working with natural resource agencies and with the private sector to protect and restore native animal and plant populations on Maui, and include maps showing in general terms the distribution of endangered species on the Island.
13. Require assessments to prevent harm to vulnerable native species in areas of proposed development. Development should avoid areas essential to the conservation and recovery of native plants and animals, unless proven conservation measures exist. Measures need to be agreed upon prior to approval of new developments.
14. Offer a framework for reducing greenhouse gas emissions on Maui, outlining strategies for renewable energy production, energy use efficiency, transportation, reforestation, sustainable agriculture, and planned low-emissions development.