



45A Welina Place, Makawao, HI 96768

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An Environmental Legacy for Maui Island

Council Chairman and Members
County of Maui, Hawaii

Dear Council:

My wife and I, both scientists, direct a small nonprofit organization dedicated to the conservation of wildlife and nature. While our projects have been mostly on the U.S. mainland and in South America, we are keenly aware of the great conservation challenges facing Hawaii and Maui, where we now live.

Under the current planning process, Maui County has a golden opportunity to do what is now absolutely essential: provide new direction for protecting coastal ecosystems, watersheds, and native flora and fauna.

On its present course, Maui will continue to lose its corals reefs, with tragic cultural, economic, and ecological consequences. Likewise, the viability of the Island's watersheds and the survival of literally hundreds of native plants and animals will be further jeopardized. The current situation can only be described as an "environmental crisis" given the fast pace of unfavorable change.

I highly commend County officials for expressing a firm intent to protect Maui's environment and its living resources. However, based on my review of the draft Maui Island Plan (MIP) and on discussions with county planners, much remains to be done to formulate objectives and policies that will work to attain these goals.

I recently submitted a set of suggestions to county planners for improving the draft MIP and a working revision by the Water Resources IRC of the General Plan Advisory Committee. I would be happy to provide upon request these details for your review.

In brief, a strong MIP should provide for:

An Effective Wastewater Treatment System – by expeditiously developing plans for a comprehensive system that prevents coastal pollution from wastewater injection wells and private facilities (injection wells, septic tanks, cesspools, etc.)

Control of Non-point Source Pollution -- to levels that do not impair coastal waters or jeopardize coral reefs, by vigorously implementing the state's non-point pollution and runoff control plans, and by other measures as needed to safeguard coastal ecosystems.

Integration of Conservation and Development – by linking the pace of development to progress made in controlling land-based pollution and protecting coastal ecosystems, and by requiring new developments to have technical and financial contingency plans for resolving any pollution problems later associated with them.

Protection of Coral Reefs, Fisheries, and Coastal Areas – by preparing a comprehensive coastal conservation program for Maui, in collaboration with state agencies and local organizations, to include a network of special conservation areas, ensure the sustainability and ecological functionality of fish populations, and protect marine species of greatest conservation need (under *Hawaii's Statewide Aquatic Wildlife Conservation Strategy*).

Conservation of Terrestrial and Fresh-water Species – with state and federal agencies and the private sector, by developing and promoting an island-wide conservation plan to prevent species extinctions and facilitate recovery of native flora and fauna. Federally-listed endangered species on Maui include over 100 plants and animals. Many more appear on the State list of "Species of Greatest Conservation Concern" (*Hawaii's Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy 2005*).

Restoration of Watersheds and Streams – by allowing development near sensitive watershed areas only when demonstrated that environmental damage can be avoided through conservation design plans and low impact development techniques; by adjusting water and stream bed uses to ensure sustained stream flow and water quality; and by vigorously promoting restoration of Maui's native forests.

An Environmental Monitoring Program – to evaluate impacts on coastal ecosystems and gauge the effectiveness of mitigation and pollution abatement programs, with the help of a commissioned expert panel to set up the program and provide measureable environmental goals.

Climate Change Abatement – by developing a framework for significantly reducing Maui's greenhouse gas emissions, promoting renewable energy production, energy use and transportation efficiency, reforestation with native trees, locally-based agriculture, and planned low-emissions development.

Kindly consider these eight objectives for the Maui Island Plan. Some could lend themselves to federal financing needed to boost local employment and invest in Maui's future. Please contact me if you would like to discuss these suggestions or need clarification on any matter.

With rapid human population growth on Maui, and with climate change, altered weather patterns, rising sea level, and increased seawater acidity already upon us, your decisions

regarding the MIP will be nothing short of historic. I strongly urge you to create a conservation legacy for Maui that future generations will be exceptionally proud of.

Best wishes,

Tony Povilitis

Tony Povilitis, Ph.D.

Cc: Planning Department