

**Testimony of Robert K. Masuda
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before
The Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands
of the
House Committee on Natural Resources
on H.R. 7045
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Chairwoman Haaland, Ranking Member Young, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of H.R. 7045, a bill to authorize the Secretary of Agriculture to conduct a study of lands that could be included in a new National Forest in Hawai'i.

My name is Bob Masuda, and I am First Deputy Director of the Hawai'i Department of Land and Natural Resources. I am testifying today on behalf of Governor David Ige and the Department of Land and Natural Resources supporting enactment of H.R. 7045. We believe the proposed study will provide valuable information and insight into natural resources management on the islands and could lead to protecting additional forest lands for the future enjoyment of Hawai'ians and the Nation. It can also serve to educate the public about National Forest management and how it can contribute to the State's conservation objectives.

There are units of the National Forest System in 42 states and Puerto Rico, but not in Hawaii. These existing National Forests and Grasslands reflect our nation's various topographies, climatic zones, and ecosystems. They also reflect on the histories and cultures of the local peoples. Hawai'i offers an opportunity to expand the scope of the National Forest System to include unique ecosystems of the tropical Pacific. The study provided by enactment of H.R. 7045 would identify the conservation possibilities and benefits that a National Forest in Hawaii would afford.

The citizens of Hawaii share a passion for the natural resources that have sustained our islands for generations. Like other island peoples around the world, we understand that we live with finite resources from limited land base. We understand that sustainability has to be the focus of land and resource management both locally and globally. The conservation and stewardship of our terrestrial and marine resources are necessary not only for the quality of life we enjoy, but for that of future generations.

Hawaii's passion and understanding of natural resource conservation are totally consistent with the practical and philosophical underpinnings of the National Forests System. The people of our State and especially our host native Hawai'ians would welcome the opportunity to continue collaboration with the U.S. Forest Service on mutual goals of resource conservation, restoration, and management. Our States Forest Reserves, watersheds and endangered species protection would align perfectly with a multi-ecosystem National Forest in Hawai'i.

H.R. 7045 represents the latest chapter in the ongoing cooperation between the State of Hawai'i and the Forest Service in the preservation and management of Hawai'i's unique tropical forests. In 1992, under the leadership of the late Senator Danial Akaka, the Congress passed the Hawai'i Tropical Forest Recovery Act (Public Law 102-574) to further research in tropical ecosystems and to designate lands for research purposes. Pursuant to that Act, the State and the Forest Service completed an Action Plan in 1994 which identified Hawai'i's unique ecological resources, the cultural ties of Native Hawai'ians to those resources, and areas of cooperative research.

In 2006, the State and the Forest Service entered into a Cooperative Agreement to implement the Action Plan. In 2007, and at the request of the Governor of Hawai'i, two experimental tropical forests were established by the Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns on state-owned land on the Big Island of Hawai'i to support intensive tropical forest research. These designations included the Laupāhoehoe Experimental Forest comprising 12,343 acres, the Pu'u Wa'awa'a Experimental Forest comprising 38,885 acres. World class forest research is being conducted on those areas by the Forest Service's Institute of Pacific Islands Forestry located on the University of Hawai'i's campus in Hilo.

We believe a National Forest in Hawai'i would serve management objectives which cannot be met by the existing units of the National Park System and the Fish & Wildlife Refuge System, both of which are legally constrained to particular management regimes. In contrast, the broader legal mandate for a National Forest includes the possibility of multiple uses including public recreation, as well as sustainable forestry and grazing while providing valuable watershed protection.

The 1994 Hawai'i Tropical Forest Recovery Action Plan identified several areas where National Forest land designations might be desirable. I will touch on a few examples.

- Hawai'i forests continue to be degraded by invasive noxious weeds and feral animals adversely affecting numerous indigenous species. Continuing Forest Service research on lands that it manages could be critical in meeting these challenges. A land base managed by the Forest Service would allow for that agency to undertake remedial control activities.
- Many lands have been adversely affected by logging, over grazing, and intensive agriculture. These lands might be restored to productivity by reforestation efforts. We note that historically the Forest Service is the premiere agency in restoring denuded lands including the over 20 million acres acquired in the east under the Weeks Act and the over 10 million acres of lands in the former dust bowl acquired under the Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act.
- Some lands may be suitable for reestablishing domestic forestry for the production of wood products, particularly koa which is extremely valuable for furniture.
- Watershed protection and enhancement is a major management goal that could be served by National Forest management.

The ultimate goal of Hawai'ians and their State government is for a public land management regime – both State and Federal – which is sustainable and meets public needs and demands for watershed protection, recreation, and forest products, yet preserving for future generations our unique tropical ecosystem. Enactment of H.R. 7045 will lay the groundwork for

a continued State-Federal partnership which will carry these land conservation objectives well into the rest of this century. Our State's resources agencies have had a long and mutually beneficial relationship with the Institute for Pacific Islands Forestry. A new National Forest in Hawaii would clearly contribute to national and planetary health at a critical time in history! We in Hawai'i would welcome the opportunity afforded by this legislation to study and explore these issues of sustainable resource management.

In closing, as you consider the future of land conservation in America and Hawai'i in particular, allow me to share with you the motto of our State which seems particularly apt to these proceedings: "**Ua Mau ke Ea o ka 'Aina i ka Pono**", "The life of the land is perpetuated in righteousness."

Thank you so much for the privilege of submitting testimony and in particular to share our thoughts on the benefits that may be considered for our State, our Nation, and our World.