

# Opening statement for the congressional briefing on preserving biological diversity in Hawai‘i

Senator Daniel K. Akaka Papers

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THE HONORABLE DANIEL K. AKAKA  
OPENING STATEMENT FOR THE CONGRESSIONAL BRIEFING ON  
PRESERVING BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY IN HAWAII  
STATE CAPITOL AUDITORIUM

JANUARY 11, 1989

Let me first thank all the witnesses that have agreed to present testimony at this Congressional Briefing on Preserving Biological Diversity in Hawaii. You are all experts in your respective fields, and we look forward to hearing from you.

Today we will hear from witnesses representing: 1) major federal and state agencies with responsibility for conservation and protection of biological resources, 2) public and private research organizations that focus on identifying, cataloging and preserving Hawaii's biota, and 3) environmental organizations that have championed the cause of preserving biodiversity.

I am glad that we have so many players involved in this important movement. Given the size and the complexity of the task, we need all the help we can get.

Let me also express my deep appreciation to my colleague, Representative Jim Scheuer for being with us today. He is Chairman of the Science and Technology Subcommittee on Natural Resources, Agriculture Research and the Environment.

There is no one in Congress who is more informed about the issue of preserving biological diversity than Congressman Jim

Scheuer. He is our beacon in the darkness on this important subject.

Congressman Scheuer's deep understanding prompted him to sponsor H.R. 4335, the National Environmental Diversity Conservation and Environmental Research Act, a bill which would impose many landmark requirements designed to conserve biological diversity. Congressman Scheuer, the concerns addressed in your bill embrace the very foundation of life on our planet. I am happy to be a cosponsor of his bill, and look forward to it being enacted into law. The day it reaches the President's desk and is signed into law will be none too soon.

I also want to offer special words of praise for the Nature Conservancy and its work in Hawaii. Through the work of the Conservancy and its Hawaii Heritage Program, the urgent need for endangered species conservation has become more widely known.

Through the leadership of the Nature Conservancy, the preservation of endangered life forms is finally becoming one of the leading social, political and economic issues of our time. Recognition of this concern climaxed last week when TIME Magazine took the bold step of naming the "endangered Earth" as "Planet of the Year" in lieu of the traditional Man of the Year.

As the rest of the nation begins to "wake up" to the issue of biological diversity, Hawaii is already off to a head start, thanks to the efforts of the Nature Conservancy and other organizations like it. In the nine years since the Hawaii chapter was founded, The Nature Conservancy of Hawaii has grown to over 7,000 members and raised millions of dollars for the protection of more than 40,000 acres of land -- habitat critical to the survival of 14 of Hawaii's endangered forest bird species

and thousands of other native plants and animals.

For this we thank you. Keep up the good work.

I strongly support legislation to establish national policies to conserve biological diversity. The need is urgent, for without an immediate, national commitment we will lose some of the most precious and irreplaceable resources our country and the world have to offer -- our unique heritage of plants, animals, and other organisms that make possible much or all of the food, medicine, clean air, clean water, and countless other necessities that sustain our quality of life.

An irreversible decline of biological diversity is now taking place. With each habitat that is destroyed and each species that becomes extinct, more biological diversity is forever lost and we travel further and further down a one-way path from which there is no return.

Nowhere is the situation more desperate than in Hawaii. Hawaii may be the 50th state, but it is the first in terms of biological diversity. Our unique islands are home to tens of thousands of species found nowhere else on earth. Many face certain extinction unless we act now to protect these species. Nature will not offer us a second chance.

Although our state comprises less than 0.2% of the total land area of the United States, Hawaii is home to more than 25% of our country's endangered and threatened plants and animals. It is a sad but sobering fact that Hawaiian species account for more than 70% of all recorded extinctions in the United States.

Hawaii is also this country's primary tropical resource. Thus, it is one of the few locations in the United States where we have the opportunity to preserve tropical ecosystems. And,

because the vast majority of the world's biological diversity lies in the tropics, Hawaii is the logical place to develop practical research strategies and cost-effective conservation methods that can be shared worldwide. Hawaii can serve as an evolutionary laboratory to further research vital to our understanding of much of the world's remaining biodiversity.

The continued loss of biological diversity will have profound consequences for the welfare of mankind. Only recently have we begun to truly appreciate the scope of this problem and its effect on nature's subtle machinery. What we now know should be sufficient to frighten each of us into the realization that conserving biological diversity is nothing short of an ecological imperative for man and his future here on earth.

Thank you.

Questions for: Mr. Kelvin Taketa  
The Nature Conservancy

\*\* Anyone who focuses on this topic soon realizes that preserving biological diversity is an issue of monumental proportions. It is an environmental issue of worldwide dimension which will remain a prominent concern for the foreseeable future -- certainly into the next century.

\*\* With so many individuals involved in such an immense task, an obvious issue is coordination.

Q: Mr. Taketa, how can we avoid duplication and promote coordination so that scarce dollars and human resources are used to their best advantage?

\*\* The Nature Conservancy has devoted a large amount of its resources to Hawaii and has given our state special emphasis in its program of preserving biodiversity.

Q: In your analysis, is this problem being given the recognition it deserves from federal and state agencies and other private sector organizations?

Q: Do you sense that there is a coherent federal strategy on the conservation of biological diversity in Hawaii?

Q: Facilitating acquisitions of critical habitat has been one of The Nature Conservancy's hallmarks. How have recent acquisitions helped further the cause of protecting endangered species and promoting biological diversity?

\*\* Are there still gaps in Hawaii's habitat preserves and will further acquisitions be necessary?

\*\* Multi-agency coordinating groups made up of public and private organizations have been forming around the country to cope with the problem of coordinating resource management. A good example of this is the Greater Yellowstone Coalition which serves Yellowstone National Park.

Q: In light of the fact that nature usually ignores the boundaries and jurisdictions established by man, do you think it would be useful to establish a formal coordinating group to address the issue of preserving biodiversity and protecting endangered species in Hawaii?

Questions for Panel One: Mr. Bryan Harry  
National Park Service

Mr. Al Marmelstein  
Fish and Wildlife Service

Mr. Bill Paty  
Dept. of Land & Natural Resources

\*\* With my first question I hope to resolve a lingering concern that has surfaced during my work in Washington. Both the New York Times and Readers Digest were highly critical of an appropriation I sponsored the past two years for "pig and exotic plant control" at Volcanoes and Haleakala National Parks. Apparently, neither publication bothered to investigate the substance of these appropriations, so their readers have no idea just how critical this program actually is.

Q: Mr. Harry, for the record would you please tell us what work you are performing with these funds and how valuable this appropriation is to preserving habitat within the Parks?

\*\* Next, a question for Mr. Marmelstein.

\*\* In the Fiscal Year that began last October, Congress provided a total of \$3 million to acquire critical habitat for the Oahu Forest Birds and the James Campbell National Wildlife Refuge. The Hawaii Delegation fought long and hard for these appropriations because these habitats are critical to so many endangered species. I intend to request additional appropriations in the coming year to complete these acquisitions.

Q: Mr. Marmelstein, what is the status of your agency's negotiations to acquire these parcels?

Q: I am especially concerned about the Oahu Forest Birds acquisition, because I know that there is a competing offer to purchase this land for commercial purposes. I urge you to aggressively pursue that acquisition in the coming month because it would be tragic if the forest birds parcel were not set aside for conservation and wildlife habitat.

Q: How do land acquisitions such as these help preserve Hawaii's biodiversity?

\*\* The next question is appropriate for either Mr. Marmelstein or Mr. Harry. As I mentioned earlier, the task of coordinating efforts in the areas of preservation and conservation of biological diversity is a monumental undertaking.

Q: How do state and federal agencies in Hawaii approach the issue of coordination? Also, do you feel that greater attention could be given to coordination?

Q: What about formal cooperative agreements? Would they help to address the issue of managing ecosystems in a coordinated way?

Q: When you examine the efforts to preserve biodiversity in

Hawaii, where do you feel you are achieving the greatest success and what areas represent the greatest challenge for your agencies?

Q: Introduced species represent the greatest threat to endangered wildlife. Can more be done to limit the harmful effects of caused by introduced species?

\*\* I would like to direct the next question to Mr. Harry and Mr. Marmelstein.

Q: What kind of priority is Hawaii's struggle to preserve biodiversity being given within the national mandate of the National Park Service and the Fish and Wildlife Service?

Q: Have your Washington offices issued any directives to the field on the issue of preserving biodiversity, or has most of the initiative in this area come from field offices such as yours?

\*\* Finally, I would like to return to Mr. Paty.

Q: Earlier I spoke of the purchasing of critical habitat by the Federal Government. Will the State be acquiring critical habitats by purchase?

Q: At last count, the State of Hawaii has twelve functional plans, one of which is the State Conservation Lands Plan. What is your reaction to a state plan on the issue of conserving biodiversity? Do you feel that separate attention should be given to this issue, or can you effectively handle it within the confines of the Conservation Lands Plan?

Questions for Panel Two: Dr. Don Duckworth  
Bishop Museum

Dr. Ken Kaneshiro  
Hawaii Evolutionary Biology Program

Dr. Cliff Smith  
Cooperative Park Studies Unit

Q: Gentlemen, in what ways do you find that the biodiversity research you perform is finding its way into the conservation practices of state and federal agencies that have the responsibility for conservation and habitat management?

Q: Do you find that there is a "research lag" between the time that you develop understandings from your work in the field or laboratory and the time that these findings are incorporated into conservation practice?

\*\* The federal government supports research to improve our understanding of critical habitats and the endangered species that rely on these habitats. Without even asking, I'm sure that you all would like to see such research expended.

Q: In light of your understanding of the federal research effort, where would you say that federal research dollars are best spent? In other words, where are we getting the best "bang" for the federal research dollar?

Q: To what extent can the concentrated efforts that have been undertaken in Hawaii serve as a model for addressing this problem elsewhere in the United States and elsewhere in the world?

\*\* During the last session of Congress, Congressman Scheuer introduced the National Biological Diversity Conservation and Environmental Research Act. I was proud to be a cosponsor of this legislation and look forward to cosponsoring it again in the 101st Congress.

\*\* One of its provisions would establish a National Center for Biological Diversity and Environmental Research.

Q: How could such a center provide leadership and coordination as we work to promote knowledge of our nation's biota.

Questions for Panel Three: Mr. Bruce Eilerts  
Hawaii Audubon Society

Ms. Susan Miller  
Nat. Resources Defense Council

Mr. Ed Stevens  
Sierra Club

Mr. Rick Scudder  
Conservation Council

\*\* We have heard the concerns of four of the prominent environmental organizations in the State of Hawaii. Earlier we heard from a fifth organization, The Nature Conservancy.

Q: How do you work together to foster cooperation and avoid duplication of effort as you seek to address the loss of biodiversity?

Q: Earlier I questioned another witness about the benefits of establishing a multi-agency coordinating group to coordinate efforts to preserve biodiversity. What are your views on the subject. Do you feel that a coordinating council makes sense?

Q: What is your evaluation of the job that federal and state agencies are doing to maintain critical habitat and preserve biodiversity? Are they doing the best they can with the resources they have?

\*\* During the last session of Congress, Congressman Scheuer and I cosponsored the National Biological Diversity Conservation and Environmental Research Act.

\*\* One of its provisions would require agencies to assess impacts on biodiversity when issuing environmental impact statements.

Q: What are your thoughts on such a requirement?