

"Certification and the future of forestry in Hawai'i"

Senator Daniel K. Akaka Papers

Public relations, Speeches, statements, and messages, Box PR19, Folder 21

<https://hdl.handle.net/10524/78983>

Items in eVols are protected by copyright, with all rights reserved, unless otherwise indicated.

UHM Library Digital Collections Disclaimer and Copyright Information

REMARKS OF
SENATOR DANIEL K. AKAKA
"CERTIFICATION AND THE FUTURE OF FORESTRY IN HAWAII"
PUUWAAWAA RANCH, HAWAII
SATURDAY, AUGUST 23, 1997

ALOHA!

Let me extend a special welcome to the many representatives of the National Association of Conservation Districts who are participating in this year's leadership conference.

If you have not learned it, let me be the first to teach you some Hawaiian. The word for tonight is ono. We use it to describe good food. And when the food is really good -- like tonight's luau -- we say it with a lot of feeling. (Ono, sooooo ono, etc.)

It's more than good food and Big Island aloha that brings me here tonight. I have come to support the TREE Center and the valuable work of this organization.

Five years ago, when I was working to enact the Hawaii Tropical Forestry Recovery Act, I recognized the need for greater awareness of the importance of Hawaii's forests. Hawaii's tropical forests are home to some of the richest biological diversity on the planet.

Our forests, especially forest lands cleared for sugarcane or pasture, are also a tremendous, untapped source of economic opportunity. But five years ago, few people had an appreciation of the gold mine that surrounds them.

Thanks to the efforts of TREE, and the Kona Soil and Water Conservation District, we are educating a new generation about forest ecology and sustainable forestry development. TREE is working to keep the promise of the Hawaii Tropical Forest Recovery Act alive.

Agriculture has long been the backbone of the economy of rural Hawaii. Recently, however, the decline of sugarcane has caused an upheaval for many rural communities, especially here on the Big Island. Since the Hawaii Tropical Forest Recovery Act became law, our state has lost 700,000 acres of sugarcane.

For more than 160 years, sugar provided jobs and a special way of life for communities throughout the state. Our great challenge is to develop new opportunities that keep Hawaii green and economically productive for at least as long -- and hopefully longer -- than our relationship with sugar.

The future of rural Hawaii is in forestry. And, some of the best land for forestry is found on the Big Island.

But what will forestry in Hawaii look like 10, 20 or 50 years from now? Many people have strong feelings about how to answer this question.

Sustainability is the emerging idea in forest development. We must manage our resources to meet the needs of the present generation without compromising the needs of future generations. This means practicing stewardship that integrates the growth, nurturing, and harvesting of trees with the conservation of soil, air, water, and wildlife.

In Hawaii, the stewardship ethic is very strong, especially within the forestry community. But in many countries, stewardship and responsible forest development is weak or nonexistent.

Across the globe, forests are disappearing at an unprecedented rate, and nowhere is this problem more severe than in the tropics. More than half of the world's tropical rain forests have been consumed, degraded, or destroyed in this century.

Because of the attention being given to forest degradation, consumers are asking questions about the source of the wood products they buy and the conditions under which they are grown and harvested. This has prompted manufacturers and retailers to demand, and foresters to supply, wood products from well-managed forests.

As the demand for sustainable forest products has increased, criteria for sustainable forestry has been formalized. The result is a world-wide movement to verify that sustainable forestry claims are genuine. This process is known as certification.

I know that the Hawaii Forest Industry Association examined the issue of forestry certification a few years ago, and I am sure that they continue to monitor the issue closely. What I am proposing today is a new dialogue on forestry certification. I am inviting all stakeholders in this issue -- Hawaii's forest industry, landowners, conservation experts, and affected communities -- to begin a free and open exchange about forest certification.

Let me say a few more things about certification. For consumers, certification is a way of ensuring that forest products they purchase do not contribute to forest degradation. Independent verification is the "Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval" telling them that sustainable standards are being met.

To landowners, certification is a way of ensuring that their careful management is recognized in the marketplace. A certification label may result in a premium for your products, better market access, and in some cases, more secure supply agreements. The best way for the Hawaii forest industry to increase the value of their resource may be to sell certified tropical wood products into a world market that recognizes the abuse that tropical forests have suffered -- and is willing to pay more for a tropical product that has received the proper certification.

Just how widespread is certification today? Forest certification is big business. Certification is practiced in 25 countries. European and North American buyers groups have committed to wood products certification. Eleven nations, including Germany and France, are represented in the European buyers group.

Certification is voluntary, not mandatory. Over time, however, I expect that landowners who do not employ sustainable practices and do not seek certification will find it more difficult to market their timber.

Although forestry certification standards are high, certification will not require perfection. Remember that forestry, like agriculture, is subject to the forces of nature, and nature is often unpredictable.

Later this year, I will convene a meeting in Hawaii to further the dialogue about forest certification. For certification to become successful in Hawaii, I believe that a "bottom up" rather than "top down" approach to consensus-building makes the most sense.

At the same time, however, I am developing legislation to promote certification. My bill will establish standards for certifying that Hawaii forest products are cultivated, harvested, and processed in a sustainable manner. As I begin to circulate this proposal, I invite the comments and suggestions of the Hawaii forest industry and affected communities.

I certainly recognize that certification could take hold without action by Congress, but the right bill at the right time can help jump start the process and provide a format for our dialogue. I will be the first one to cheer if certification becomes a reality, whether my bill becomes law or not.

Finally, I have invited the Secretary of Agriculture, Dan Glickman, to Hawaii to witness the challenges and opportunities that we face today. Secretary Glickman can focus the resources and expertise of USDA on our problems, and help our forestry dreams take root and prosper.

Thank you.

###