

Western Governors Association Workshop on
Endangered Species Act

April 7, 2016

Governor David Ige's Remarks

Aloha!

To those of you who have joined us from other states, welcome to the Hawaiian Islands...where we are known around the world for our unique people, place and culture.

We're pleased to host this workshop as part of the Western Governors' Species Conservation and Endangered Species Act Initiative.

To the kama'aina participating today, mahalo for sharing your experiences with our guests and with each other.

I'm sure you're all familiar with the photos taken from the Apollo 8 spacecraft of the Earth rising above the lunar horizon. Those images were the first to show what a small island Earth is in space.

Similarly, satellite photos of Hawai'i show just how small and isolated these islands are from most of the world's population. As you know, Hawai'i is 2,200 miles from the nearest continent.

Hawaii has been unique since birth, rising out of the ocean in an explosion of new land, millions and millions of years ago.

To that barren new land, long ago, came seeds and spores carried by the wind and waves, and by the wings of birds. They came slowly, with thousands of years passing between the arrival of one species and the arrival of another. In their isolation here in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, and over millions of years, they evolved into one of the most unique and celebrated collections of species in the world.

The Polynesians who first settled in the Hawaiian Islands practiced the finest land management and resource system in history and were able to sustain a large population. Later immigrants brought their own beliefs, heritage, music, food and values. Together, the people of Hawai'i are playing a critical role in resolving issues that face humanity, such as the management of our natural

resources, including endangered species, and the generation of clean energy.

The issues being discussed at this workshop are urgent ones for our state. Hawai'i has been called the endangered species capitol of the world. A number of these species exist nowhere else. Since the arrival of humans in these islands, we've lost dozens of endemic species. Today, we have more endangered species than any other state. Of all the plants and birds known to be extinct in the nation, two-thirds are from Hawai'i.

The Hawaiian monk seal is listed as Endangered under the Endangered Species Act. The population is currently only about 1,100 and decreasing approximately 4% per year. Other mammals on the list include the humpback whale and the Hawaiian hoary bat. The Kaua'i cave wolf spider, many species of birds, several reptiles, like the Honu – or green turtle, snails and a wide [variety of plants](#) (picture of Hawaiian Gardenia) are also on the list.

It's not all doom and gloom. There are some bright spots. Recently, San Diego Zoo Institute for Conservation

Research biologists, with support from our Dept. of Land and Natural Resources and the Kauai Endangered Forest Bird Recovery Project, successfully hatched and raised 11 Hawaiian crow chicks, or 'alala. These new birds bring the population to 77, which is a significant increase for a species that numbered as few as 20 birds in 1994. The 'alala is considered extinct in the wild.

These successes have been made possible, at least in part, by the Endangered Species Act. It has raised awareness and put into place procedures for helping to preserve animal species. On March 29, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced the addition of 157,000 acres of critical habitat for 125 species of plants and animals on Moloka'i, Maui and Kaho'olawe. The species included plants like the Haleakala silversword, forest birds and a tree snail.

There have been instances, however, when equally important environmental goals have not been easy to align with the ESA. Renewable energy is one such example.

Hawai'i is the most oil-dependent state in the nation, and we are committed to reaching 100 percent renewable energy use in the electricity sector by the year 2045.

We are fortunate that Hawai'i is blessed with an abundance of renewable energy resources. Thanks to Hawai'i's steady trade winds our wind turbines are among the most productive in the world. Hawai'i's abundant sunshine also makes power generation from solar panels a popular option in the state. We lead the nation in installed PV on a per-capita basis. In addition, Hawai'i is one of only eight states with installed geothermal capacity – and we see geothermal as a long-term anchor to our diverse energy mix.

I have no doubt that we can reach our goals. And along the way we will have to work closely with our federal, local and community partners to resolve some of the ESA issues.

For example, while wind turbines provide clean, locally produced renewable energy, they also pose a risk to our native birds and our only native land mammal, the Hawaiian Hoary bat. In 2015, the legislature enacted a bill, making the Hawaiian Hoary Bat Hawai'i's State land

mammal. This risk also applies to other native and endangered species like the nene (Hawaiian goose), the Hawaiian Petrel, and the Newell's Shearwater.

However, Hawai'i is proud to be the first state in the nation to institute habitat conservation plans for wind energy projects, ensuring a net benefit is provided for our native wildlife while we work towards achieving our clean energy goals.

The state has a process for implementing habitat conservation plans, safe harbor agreements, and incidental take licenses as recovery options for conserving and protecting the state's threatened and endangered species. Participants are currently providing funding for a multitude of successful conservation projects throughout the State. This includes:

- Seabird colony protection through innovative fencing and predator control programs
- Waterbird protection through wetland restoration initiatives
- Forest restoration projects that enhance the habitat of the Hawaiian Hoary Bat
- Native owl research and rehabilitation

- And the reestablishment of rare plant populations.

These efforts are invaluable in the process of recovering the State's endangered species, and they allow the continued operation of renewable energy enterprises.

It will take a continued concerted effort to balance the needs of the native plant and wildlife species in our islands with the needs of Hawaii's human inhabitants. In moving forward, we take direction from the Native Hawaiians who were the first stewards of these islands – from the mountains to the sea.

Right now, the Hōkūle'a, a Polynesian voyaging canoe, is sailing across Earth's oceans on its Mālama Honua Worldwide Voyage. Mālama Honua means "to care for our Earth." At each port of call, the crew is sharing the lessons we've learned living on an island chain: Our natural world is a gift with limits, and we must carefully steward this gift if we are to survive together.

It's an honor and privilege to host this workshop in the Aloha State...on behalf of our people...I wish all of you...my sincere mahalo and deepest aloha.