

Governor’s Military Advisory Committee on Army-Leased Lands

November 25, 2025

Meeting Minutes

Attendees:

William Ailā

Ryan Kanaka’ole

Kūhiō Lewis

Laurie McAllister Moore

Mahina Paishon

Ed Sniffen

Summer Sylva

Kali Watson

Noe Noe Wong-Wilson

Scott Glenn

I. Welcome and Roundtable Introductions

The meeting opened with acknowledgment of the committee’s purpose and the Governor’s request that the committee support strategic thinking around the future of the US Army’s lands leases from the State of Hawai’i. The Governor was not present, as this meeting’s purpose was to convene the group and provide baseline information as an orientation. He will attend future meetings. Members introduced themselves and described the roles they hold in their communities, including Native Hawaiian community leadership, cultural practice, nonprofit and advocacy work, and state agency leadership. Many participants noted that although the subject matter is complex, sensitive, and often contentious, they felt a sense of kuleana to contribute where they could. Several emphasized that they hope their participation will help ensure accuracy, integrity, and balance in the State’s conversations with the federal government. Members acknowledged both the weight of community expectations and the desire for honest, fact-based dialogue.

A delayed member was noted. In coordination with that member, the group agreed to begin the meeting and brief the member upon arrival.

II. Roles and Responsibilities

The committee’s role is to provide strategic guidance to the Governor on matters concerning Army-leased state lands. This guidance may include advice on strategic posture, public communication, risk assessment, potential community benefits, and the broader implications of decisions on community trust, Native Hawaiian rights, and state–federal relationships. The committee does not negotiate with the federal government and does not hold decision-making authority. Final decisions rest with the Governor and the constitutional, statutory, and public processes required by state law.

To support the implementation of specific agreements, Technical Working Groups (TWGs) may be created for topic-specific implementation. These groups would consist of subject-matter practitioners focused solely on technical implementation. For example, if the federal government were to agree to return the federal portions of Mākua Valley, the State could create a TWG with the appropriate technical, legal, and administrative expertise to carry out

the work. TWGs would not be substitutes for consultation and would operate within Hawai'i's laws and processes.

Committee members asked clarifying questions about how community voices will be incorporated into both the advisory process and the State's broader approach. There was particular interest in ensuring that the committee is not perceived as the sole source of Native Hawaiian consultation or the definitive representative body for the lāhui. Members expressed concern that without clear communication, the public might misinterpret the group's purpose or assume that it speaks on behalf of Native Hawaiians.

There was a collective agreement that the committee's scope, purpose, and limitations must be stated publicly. Members also agreed that meaningful consultation with communities across Hawai'i must occur.

III. Grounding Principles

The committee agreed to a set of grounding principles to support open and respectful dialogue. First, the group agreed to operate under a modified version of the Chatham House Rule. This approach allows participants to discuss the substance of the meeting publicly while avoiding attribution of specific statements to individual members. The intention is not to limit transparency, but to ensure that members can ask questions, test ideas, and speak candidly without their remarks being taken out of context or used in ways that could undermine thoughtful deliberation. All substantive content from the meetings will be summarized and made publicly available.

Second, the committee agreed to work by consensus. Members agreed recommendations should reflect broad alignment rather than majority voting. The group also agreed that meetings should be rescheduled if community members are unable to attend, recognizing the importance of their presence and perspectives. While the Governor may still need to act at times, consensus within the committee will be the guiding norm wherever practical.

Finally, the committee affirmed the importance of transparency. Members emphasized that meeting minutes must be made public, that the committee's purpose must be described clearly, and that the public should have ways to engage beyond reading minutes after the fact. Several members referenced the September 26, 2025 letter from 39 Native Hawaiian organizations, emphasizing that the concerns and principles outlined therein should be acknowledged and response considered.

IV. Historical Context

An overview of the history and status of Army-leased state lands was presented, supported by a working draft GIS map that reflects months of interagency work. The discussion focused on distinguishing between different types of federal holdings, including fee-simple federal lands retained before statehood, lands leased to the Army under the 1964 agreements, and parcels acquired later through purchase, such as the Ke'amoku parcel at Pōhakuloa. The leased lands are set to expire in 2029. It was noted that other services (i.e.,

Navy, Air Force) have leases expiring after the Army leases, but those are not the group's current focus.

Members discussed the public confusion surrounding these lands. Many in the community assume that the entirety of areas such as Pōhakuloa or Mākua are leased to the Army, when in reality only discrete portions fall under the 1964 leases. For example, the committee noted that approximately 23,000 acres at Pōhakuloa are the actual leased lands, while the surrounding areas are federal fee-simple holdings or lands the Army has since purchased. A similar misunderstanding exists at Mākua, where only the makai portion is part of the lease, while ongoing discussions with the Army have been to return the entire valley, including areas held by the federal government in fee or otherwise acquired.

The committee agreed it is critical to correct these misunderstandings and present accurate, accessible mapping to the public. Several members emphasized that having a clear historical context will be essential to rebuilding trust and enabling informed dialogue in the months ahead. Members requested additional information be included in the draft map but agreed that it is more important to finalize the existing information and make the map available to the public with an explanation that refinements will be added as interagency data verification continues.

V. Legal Pathways

The committee was presented with three legal pathways identified early in the process as a starting point for understanding the range of possible approaches the State and federal government might take regarding the future of the Army's leases: leasing, land exchange, and federal condemnation authority. These pathways are non-exhaustive and may expand or shift as additional options, priorities, or constraints emerge through public processes and community engagement. The discussion was informational and focused on building shared understanding rather than indicating support for or opposition to a particular approach.

The discussion began with leasing, which would involve the Army seeking to extend its use of lands historically held by the Hawaiian Kingdom government and now administered as part of the State's public land trust (commonly referred to as "ceded lands") beyond 2029. The Army has indicated in conversations that short-term leases of five to ten years would not meet its operational needs. Members noted that any lease would require compliance with environmental review, statutes, and a robust public process. Leasing could also include negotiated conditions such as restrictions on activities, cultural access, cleanup commitments, or stewardship agreements.

The second pathway, land exchange, would involve swapping lands of equivalent value between the federal government and the State. Members acknowledged this option is more complex because it involves ceded lands and therefore greater public trust obligations. Land exchange would require approval by the Board of Land and Natural Resources legally required notice to the Office of Hawaiian Affairs, and legislative approval, each of which would require substantial public transparency and consultation.

The third pathway, federal condemnation authority, prompted substantial discussion because of public confusion on the matter. Condemnation refers to the federal government's ability to acquire land for public purposes through eminent domain, requiring that the current landowner be compensated at fair market value. Committee members emphasized the importance of explaining to the public that condemnation, if pursued, would be a federal initiative, not a State-driven process, and that the State cannot legally prevent condemnation when the federal government acts under national defense authorities.

Following the State's rejection of the Army's two environmental impact statements earlier in 2025, senior Army officials signaled that they were considering expedited condemnation as a means of securing continued access to training lands. These communications created significant urgency and concern. In meetings with federal leadership in mid-2025, the Governor firmly pushed back against any unilateral federal action, insisting that the Army respect Hawai'i's legal processes, public participation requirements, and the State's sovereign responsibilities. In those discussions, the Governor also emphasized that if the federal government were to pursue condemnation, any evaluation of compensation must account for the profound historical, cultural, and environmental impacts that military use of these lands has had on Hawai'i.

As a result of those early exchanges, the Army agreed to pause consideration of immediate unilateral action and to continue discussions with the State. While more recent developments suggest a reduced likelihood of near-term federal action, members noted that the possibility of condemnation has not been fully resolved. The committee agreed that clear public communication is essential to ensuring that the community understands the distinct roles of the State and the federal government, and the efforts undertaken to protect Hawai'i's interests. These exchanges are part of an evolving dialogue and the committee's ongoing work. Forthcoming community engagement may significantly inform or reshape the path forward.

Across the three pathways discussed, and potential pathways not discussed or identified, the committee emphasized that transparent communication and meaningful public engagement will be critical to reducing misunderstanding, supporting informed dialogue, and ensuring that decisions about Hawai'i's lands contribute to unity rather than division. Future meetings may include the discussion of additional pathways not currently described.

VI. Recent Events and Community Perspectives

A substantial portion of the meeting focused on community concerns, expectations, and the need for clear and transparent communication from the State. Members highlighted the September 26, 2025 letter from thirty-nine Native Hawaiian organizations, which outlines five key expectations: 1) meaningful Native Hawaiian representation in decision-making; 2) vigorous pursuit of cleanup and return of leased military lands; 3) strong oversight, accountability, and restitution; 4) strict compliance with existing law; and 5) adherence to the principles of free, prior, and informed consent. Members agreed that these concerns must be acknowledged publicly and incorporated into the State's approach.

Committee members shared that many Native Hawaiians and community advocates fear that decisions may move too quickly or without adequate consultation. Several expressed caution that this committee might be misconstrued as providing full consent on behalf of the broader community, particularly if the State does not simultaneously establish broader engagement. Members also observed that public uncertainty has been amplified by inconsistent messaging from federal agencies, both within the Department of Defense and with other federal departments, and widespread misunderstandings about which specific lands are under discussion. They emphasized that these misunderstandings are reasonable given the complexity of the issue and the lack of clear, unified information to date.

Members emphasized the importance of communicating accurately the State's role in early conversations with the federal government, and of avoiding narratives that suggest decisions have been predetermined. They noted that some public commentary assumes the Governor has already accepted or is advancing a particular outcome. Members agreed that future messaging should clarify that discussions with federal agencies remain ongoing, that no commitments have been made, and that community input is expected to play a central role in shaping the State's position.

The committee agreed that effective public engagement must accompany every stage of this process. Posting meeting minutes is a good start, along with maintaining a clear central information portal through engage.hawaii.gov, but there should be robust, meaningful, and ongoing opportunities for public feedback, and proactive public communication are needed to ensure accuracy and transparency.

VII. Next Steps

The meeting concluded with agreement to prepare meeting minutes and a [news release](#) summarizing the meeting and to clearly state that the committee is advisory, not a decision-making body. The group supported updating the Engage website to include committee information, meeting summaries, and highlight that it is a way for public feedback.

The draft GIS map discussed in the meeting will undergo additional verification before being shared publicly. Finally, the committee agreed that the next meeting should focus on a deeper examination of land retention scenarios, identification of priorities and community benefits, and providing input on the broader community engagement plan.

The committee agreed that subsequent meetings should deepen the discussion of the legal and procedural pathways, examine potential scenarios and their implications, and clarify community priorities for any future agreements. Members also stressed that upcoming meetings should help inform broader community engagement and ensure that public outreach begins early and remains continuous. The Governor has indicated his intention to meet directly with the committee at a future session.