



SIERRA CLUB OF HAWAI'I

MĀLAMA I KA HONUA. *Cherish the Earth.*

Sierra Club of Hawai'i stands with kia'i mauna ***Statement regarding the Thirty Meter Telescope on Mauna Kea***

Friday, August 2, 2019

Since 1977, the Sierra Club of Hawai'i has raised concerns about telescope construction on Mauna Kea, and since 1998 the Sierra Club has called for a full moratorium on all construction at the summit. We renewed this call in 2010 when the University of Hawai'i released its Comprehensive Management Plan for the lands it leases at the summit of Mauna Kea that failed to take any substantive actions to improve conditions on the summit.¹ Today, in solidarity with the many organizations and individuals opposing the Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT) planned for the northern plateau of this mountain, we are once again calling for a halt to all construction in the Mauna Kea Conservation District.

As the elected leaders of the Sierra Club of Hawai'i Executive Committee, we agree that astronomy is a noble endeavor that can benefit humanity. We acknowledge that some of our members may support constructing the TMT on Mauna Kea. However, we find that in this situation, the benefits of this planned construction are outweighed by the harm that construction would cause to this Conservation District and to the people of Hawai'i who value Mauna Kea for ecological, cultural, and religious importance.

We respect that for Hawaiians, there is only one Hawai'i, one homeland, and only one Mauna Kea. There is no replacement, no alternative, for this particular mountain. As Amnesty International highlights, proceeding with the TMT project on Mauna Kea without the free, prior, and informed consent of indigenous Hawaiians is a human rights violation.²

Consistent with its sacred status, Mauna Kea is designated in state law as a conservation district. The summit region of Mauna Kea is home to the largest recorded archaeological and cultural sites in the Pacific, recognized as a state historic district and traditional cultural property, and a national natural landmark in recognition of its unique geologic features. This is a place where nature should dominate, not human-made construction.

Unfortunately, there is a general consensus that 40 years of western astronomy on Mauna Kea has caused significant adverse impact to the natural and cultural resources of this mountain. The TMT Corporation has known about this general consensus since at least 2007.³ Mercury spills, unlined

¹ https://sierraclubhawaii.org/wp-content/uploads/Final_2010_Mauna_Kea_Policy-1.pdf

² <https://thehawaiiindependent.com/story/amnesty-international-calls-for-tmt-moratorium>

³ <https://dlnr.hawaii.gov/mk/files/2017/01/B.17ae-Assessment-of-TMT-Risks-Moore-Foundation-2007.pdf>

cesspools, ancient view planes obstructed, and a physically shorter summit are all the direct result of mismanaged telescope construction on Mauna Kea.

To suffer such extensive harm to such a unique and sacred place, it is clear why so many people are moved to physically protect this place from further degradation. Looking at this conflict from a land use perspective, it does not matter what is proposed for construction—a house, a hospital, a hotel—if it does not comply with the criteria requiring that “natural beauty” be improved, then the project should not be built in a conservation district. Undermining the standards put in place to protect Mauna Kea undermines the strength of all of Hawai‘i’s conservation areas.⁴

If we are to succeed in creating a future where all of us thrive—from the wekiu bug to the polar bear, from the scientist to the religious leader and every being in-between—then we must listen when our neighbor says “no” to an action that directly harms them.

This principle of equity and justice underscores everything the Sierra Club is doing in the 21st century to protect our planet. From standing in solidarity with Black Lives Matter and LGBTQ equality to advocating in concert with indigenous people for the protection of sacred places around the world, we are embracing this moment of great opportunity to change everything about the way humanity prospers.

International scientific experts confirm that indigenous land management techniques, such as those practiced by kanaka maoli, contain important wisdom that can lead all of Earth forward towards a more sustainable future. Indigenous knowledge, sometimes understood by contemporary observers as religion, is “locally fine-tuned, which is essential for climate change adaptation and long-term community resilience.”⁵ Native self-determination and control of lands should be understood as a fundamental part of our climate change strategy.

We embrace the power of science to improve lives, protect our planet, and serve all of humanity. Science is how we understand the miracles of our amazing planet and the universe as a whole. Fortunately to pursue the science of the TMT, there are alternative locations where it could be constructed. We call on the Board of Directors of the TMT Corporation to recognize the injustice of their current course of action by voluntarily withdrawing its construction project from Mauna Kea and pursuing another location.

We also call on Governor David Ige, whom the Sierra Club twice endorsed for election as Governor, to not use emergency declarations to aid the actions of private corporations. Gov. Ige should reserve state power to protect the best interests of the public.

For all of these reasons, the Sierra Club of Hawai‘i stands with the kia‘i mauna.

⁴ <https://www.courts.state.hi.us/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/SCOT-17-0000777disam.pdf>

⁵ Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, Tebtebba ([Land Use, Climate Change Adaptation and Indigenous Peoples](#), United Nations University)