

Water essential for life, growth, sustaining economy

THE CHAMBER VIEW by Pamela Tumpap



The slogan "Water gives life" helps convey the magnitude of this essential resource

for sustaining life, our environment, community and economy — all of which need water to survive.

On Maui, water issues long have been a "hot topic" as we address providing water for agriculture, business and residential needs, and source issues to ensure that we have quality, life-giving water for existing demand as well as future growth.

The Maui Chamber of Commerce — whose mission is to advance and promote a healthy economic environment for business; to advocate responsive government and quality education, while preserving Maui's unique community characteristics — believes that control of Maui's water resources should remain with the County of Maui to the fullest extent possible, and that the county has a responsibility to develop and provide adequate water to all consumers. We feel

that the county Board of Water Supply should plan and prepare for permitted growth within Maui County in order to ensure an adequate water supply when needed, and that the state, county, large landowners and developers should cooperate to ensure that Maui's water resources are used wisely.

At this time, decisions that greatly impact Maui's water uses are being made at the state level. The state Commission on Water Resource Management is examining, and has been making decisions with respect to, stream-water use for numerous streams on Maui.

In late 2008, the commission reduced water that was being used and put it back into the streams for Native Hawaiian use and stream biology. The chamber testified against this measure as we did not feel that the impacts to other users were studied or given appropriate consideration.

Now, the commission is looking at another strong regulatory recommendation that addresses four streams in the West Maui Mountains. If adopted, this recommendation threatens to hurt our agricultural industry, businesses, residents and communities by taking away much of the water

currently used from these streams and returning it to the streams.

The commission is contemplating a high "interim in-stream flow standard," that quantifies the amount of water that must remain in the streams before water can be diverted for use elsewhere.

The recommendation being reviewed by the commission cuts the amount of stream water in half, basically giving a 50 percent water reduction to the County of Maui's Central Maui system; to Hawaiian Commercial & Sugar Co. for its 6,000 acres of sugar cane in Maalaea/Wailuku; and the broader community (already groups voluntarily are trying to conserve). The recommendation would leave surface water presently used for homes, farming and other "off-stream" uses in the stream.

Soon, an additional 19 East Maui streams will be assessed and a decision by the commission on the four streams known as Na Wai 'Eha — the Iao, Waichu, Waihee and Waikapu streams — could influence the use of water for the additional 19 streams, translating to extreme water cutbacks down the road.

HC&S, which provides ap-

proximately 800 full-time jobs to Maui residents, will be hit particularly hard if the proposed recommendation goes through. The company sustained \$13 million-plus in losses in 2008, and saw huge water reductions due to a long drought and a CWRM decision in late 2008 that reduced water available to the company from seven other East Maui streams. Thus, more water cutbacks in their operations would put the plantation's viability at risk. When jobs are needed so desperately on Maui, this does not seem the appropriate time to take such drastic measures. Large companies are not immune to economic challenges, and we already have seen significant job losses and employment reductions from big businesses that had to cut losses. We must hear HC&S'

call for help.

Furthermore, adequate water supply is necessary for much-needed affordable-housing developments and essential growth to support the housing and employment of current and upcoming generations. While the economy is suffering now, it will rebound and additional water will be required to reach these goals.

We understand that some feel a much higher level of in-stream water is necessary for stream biology, and the commission seems to favor this thinking. Yet, water long has been diverted from these streams, and there are reports that Maui's stream biology is quite healthy, with no species endangered — even with the ongoing diversion of stream water.

We feel the present recom-

mendation is too severe and threatens to hurt many "off-stream" water users. Therefore, we request that more regard be given to the economic and social benefits the use of this water provides. We ask the state Commission on Water Resource Management to hear the voices of the residents, businesses and farmers who testified and come up with a more balanced, winning solution. We advocate for an interim in-stream flow standard that protects Maui's agricultural industry and businesses, provides needed resources for the community, and allows for future growth while addressing stream biology and wise water use.

■ Pamela Tumpap is president of the Maui Chamber of Commerce.