



For Release to the Press
November 29, 2005

Contact: Representative Brian Schatz
Phone: 586-9425 (o), 384-7236 (c)

State Should Step in to Preserve Waimea

Newly Passed Legacy Lands Act Makes Funding Available for Preservation

Honolulu: Representative Brian Schatz, Vice Chair of the House Committee on Water, Land, and Ocean Resources, and one of several authors of last legislative session's Legacy Lands Act, is recommending that the state step in to save Waimea Valley from impending subdivision and development. The Legacy Lands Act, which was signed into law after the 2005 session, provides millions of dollars in additional funding for land conservation and management, and was designed to avert situations in which development pressures put precious lands in jeopardy.

The Legacy Lands Act funds the Land Conservation Fund used to protect irreplaceable habitats like Waimea Valley. Approximately \$9 million per year will go into the DLNR's Land Conservation Fund, protecting endangered species and valuable cultural and natural resources. Until now, the program has struggled financially but Legacy Lands provides an influx of funding from the increased conveyance tax. The result will be funds available for preserving areas that are deemed significant by the state and/or community.

"This is why we made this law - we have an opportunity to assist the City and County and preserve this valley for future generations. Think about it - it's simply unacceptable to see another fancy home development in the valley above Waimea Bay. It's bad for tourists and it's bad for locals," remarks Schatz.

"We passed Legacy Lands so we will be able to better protect our watersheds, coastlines, and preserve endangered cultural and natural habitats. When we have a chance to preserve open areas like this we need to take advantage of the tools at hand to do so," says Schatz.

Schatz says that because the negotiations have occurred primarily in secret, it is difficult to know with any degree of certainty what the land is worth, but he is confident that the state could afford to pitch in. "If the private sector can come to the table with one-fourth, the City could come up with one-fourth, and the state could come up with one-fourth, and the congressional delegation could come up with one-fourth, we will have saved Waimea Valley."

There are several ways to achieve this, including tapping the Legacy Lands Fund, or a direct appropriation for the purchase of the land out of the General Fund. What mechanism is the most appropriate remains to be seen, since most state leaders have not been privy to the private discussions between the City and the plaintiffs.

Schatz notes, "We have the collective resources of state, county, and federal government at our disposal, we have a community that has done years worth of work in building a real preservation plan, and we have a citizenry that recognizes that Waimea Valley is one of the most special places in the world. This isn't only about money – it's about Hawaii's future."