



DEPARTMENT OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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STREAM FLOWS TO BE RESTORED TO FIVE MOLOKA'I STREAMS FOR THE FIRST TIME IN OVER A CENTURY

(Honolulu) - After receiving more than one-hundred pieces of written testimony and hours of oral testimony at its monthly meeting yesterday, the Commission on Water Resource Management (CWRM) approved the establishment of five interim instream flow standards (IIFS) for the Island of Moloka'i. These first IIFS for Moloka'i will return water back to East Kawela, East Kawela Tributary, West Kawela, Lualohe, and Waikolu Streams. For more than a century these streams were almost fully diverted and often dry. Now stream flows are either fully or partially restored.

"I want to acknowledge the young people here attending these meetings and advocating for stream restoration and a healthier community. We have an opportunity to restore life to an area and this is moving us towards true equity," said Commissioner Dr. Aurora Kagawa-Viviani.

The Commission established a median flow IIFS (Q50) and committed to a goal of full stream restoration of East Kawela Stream, taking a phased approach to gather sufficient information to evaluate ways to accomplish that goal.

"I first worked on forested watershed protection at Kamakou Preserve mauka of Kawela Stream in 1987, so it's very moving now to finally take action to restore this water to Kawela Stream," said Commission Chair Suzanne Case.

The phased approach includes follow-up from Molokai Properties, which owns and operates the Mountain Water System. It is tasked with investigating water system loss, including reservoir evaporation, and to analyze if wastewater reuse is a potential alternative water source to meet its non-potable needs. "We are in a new paradigm of water resource management and stewardship that requires water systems to be as efficient as possible. We expect that from water operators and diverters," said Commissioner Neil Hannahs.

The Mountain Water System consists of seven diversions on various streams in the Kawela, Kaunakakai, and Waikolu hydrologic units and includes 50 million gallons in reservoir storage. The Commission will revisit additional modifications to diversions and the IIFS in 180 days while working with all the stakeholders in this process.

“In that time, we will have identified the solutions that improve the efficiency of the system for the island overall and that’s what is really going to make it work for everybody,” Commissioner Paul Meyer stated who introduced the motion to approve the IIFS.

CWRM expects these restored stream flows will have dramatic benefits for groundwater recharge and nearshore ecosystems, as well as restoring coastal spring flows critical for Limu growth.

“These decisions are intended to protect the outstanding cultural and ecological values recognized in the Kawela and Waikolu hydrologic units while balancing public trust uses of water,” said Dr. Ayron Strauch, Hydrologist with the Commission’s Stream Protection and Management Branch.

Groundwater recharge will support coastal springs, wetlands, and nearshore ecosystems. These resources support subsistence gathering and fishing of Native Hawaiians and the Moloka’i community. This includes Moloka’i Nō Ka Heke, a community group, which submitted a petition to amend the IIFS for the streams in 2019.

“We’re not acting out of greed or ignorance. Rather, we who know this ‘āina, who care for this community, are coming together and acting out of love for our Moloka’i. While our initial request was to abandon the seven intakes, we are compromising our position and asking for IIFSs for four streams in order to see our island reforested. We know climate change impacts are coming and that we need to act now to protect the resiliency of our island and of our community,” said Momi Afelin of Moloka’i Nō Ka Heke.

“In balancing protection of our water resources and ensuring reasonable and beneficial uses, I am grateful to the community, Molokai Properties, and the Department of Hawaiian Home Lands for working collaboratively to find that balance,” said Deputy Director of CWRM Kaleo Manuel.

The Commission also approved a surface water reservation for the Department of Hawaiian Home Lands of 6.0914 million gallons per day from the Waikolu Surface Water Hydrologic Unit.

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RESOURCES

(All images/video courtesy: DLNR)

More information:

<https://dlnr.hawaii.gov/cwrm/newsevents/meetings/>

HD video – April 19, 2022 CWRM meeting:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MEOKnuEIQS4>

Photographs – Moloka’i Streams:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/fbmd5pg706ivw6g/AADvty887mgSw0DFTsc8icBqa?dl=0>

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