



DEPARTMENT OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES

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**ENTIRE LAHAINA AQUIFER SECTOR AREA DESIGNATED AS SURFACE WATER &
GROUND WATER MANAGEMENT AREA**

State Water Commission Approves Plan to Mitigate Disputes

(HONOLULU) – The Lahaina Aquifer Sector Area provides water for everyone in west Maui, from Ukumehame in the south to Honokōhau in the north, comprising six ground water hydrologic units and eleven surface water hydrologic units.

Tuesday, the Commission on Water Resource Management (CWRM) unanimously agreed to designate the entire Lahaina Aquifer Sector Area as both a Surface Water and Ground Water Management Area.

In a presentation to the commission, CWRM hydrologist Dr. Ayron Strauch shared the data, science, investigations and outreach around water resources, aquifer health, and climate conditions that have brought the Commission to this point in making this management decision.

“Since 1983, we have experienced a significant decline in rainfall in West Maui that has led to a real reduction in surface water to meet instream and non-instream uses. The integration of ground and surface water sources to meet both potable and non-potable demands across hydrologic units throughout Lahaina necessitates a holistic approach and this designation brings everyone together to work collaboratively.”

The submittal followed years of scoping and information gathering from users, several earlier public Water Commission briefings, advertised notice, and the formal public hearing.

CWRM Deputy Kaleo Manuel summarized the Commission’s obligation to protect the public trust and noted that designation criteria have been met and warrant the Commission’s proactive, precautionary, and holistic approach to management in this region. “As evident in the testimony received, serious disputes over water have and continue to occur in this region. We believe designation is the best tool to ensure the protection of water resources and the reasonable and beneficial uses of water.”

The Commission carefully listened to and balanced voluminous written and oral testimony received throughout the designation process including at the Commission meeting. “Collaboration is a powerful tool. People who live in the same community, share an island, and who share resources need to work together,” said Commissioner Paul Meyer.

Both groundwater and surface water management fall under CWRM’s purview. These water resources are connected both hydrologically and via infrastructure throughout Lahaina and are used in an integrated fashion to serve the many water needs of Maui residents. The Commission has a kuleana to support domestic uses including for affordable housing, Department of Hawaiian Home Lands’ uses and traditional and customary practices while protecting stream and nearshore ecosystems.

Designation gives the Commission and CWRM staff the tools needed to identify actual uses, evaluate impacts and waste, address public trust priorities and balance needs, implement alternatives, and plan for drought conditions which the community is now experiencing more regularly. This process is integral to insure critical affordable housing projects have the domestic water supply they need to be successful and will support the integration of source development across the region to meet the goals of the County’s Water Use and Development Plan.

During final deliberations, Commissioner Michael Buck added, “The State Supreme Court has held that the commission must not relegate itself to the role of a mere ‘umpire passively calling balls and strikes for adversaries appearing before it,’ but instead must take the initiative in considering, protecting, and advancing public rights in the resource at every stake of the planning and decision-making process.”

“The State Legislature also weighed in on the State Water Code, which directs CWRM to ensure the availability of the precious resource of water to meet the present and future needs of the people,” said Commission Chair Suzanne Case. “The designation of the entire Lahaina aquifer is in line with the water code, which is both a tool and incentive for planning the wise use of Hawai’i’s water resources, rather than as a water crisis and shortage management mechanism.”

“E ‘ai kekahi, e kāpī kekahi” – eat some and salt some; the Commission’s action today ensures intergenerational water equity and takes proactive steps towards ensuring a sustainable and resilient water future,” Manuel stated.

The Commission will issue a public notice of the decision and staff will continue to collaborate and support the community, agencies, and stakeholders in the permitting process.

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To view meeting please click this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eNTZULELCdc>

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