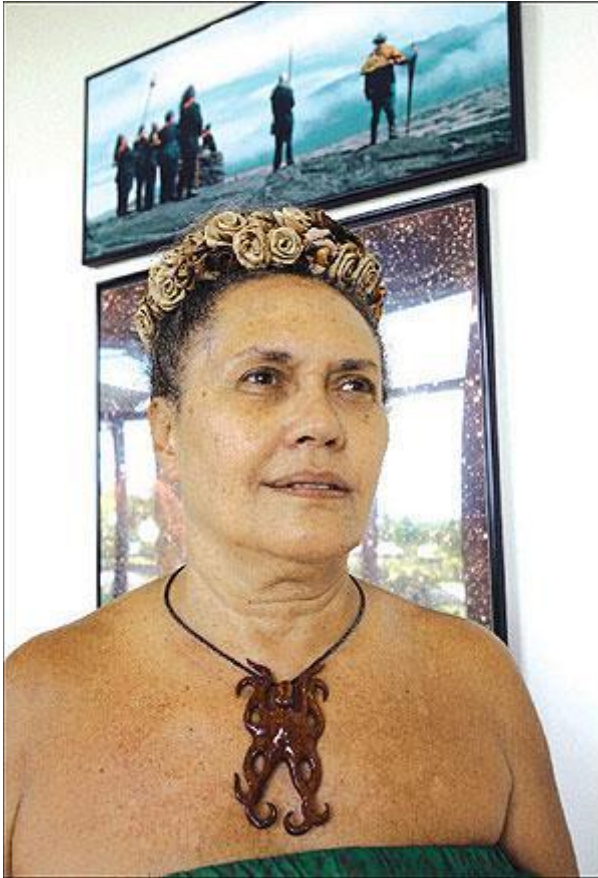


Local News

Group will fight telescope



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Moanikeala Akaka, seen recently at 'Imiloa Astronomy Center of Hawaii, is among Native Hawaiians who oppose the Thirty Meter Telescope. "There shouldn't be any more of a footprint on the mountain," she said. - William Ing/Tribune-Herald

With 13 observatories and tourism, Mauna Kea is 'at capacity,' some say

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Published: Sunday, August 31, 2008 7:51 AM HST

A Native Hawaiian leader has promised to file a contested case against the proposed Thirty Meter Telescope and take it to court, if necessary.

Mililani Trask, an attorney and former Office of Hawaiian Affairs trustee, said the hearing "may be a necessity."

The TMT project is a collaborative effort involving the Association of Canadian Universities for Research in Astronomy, the California Institute of Technology and the University of California.

The group proposes building the world's largest telescope, with a 98-foot (30 meter) primary mirror, either on a mountain in Chile or on the northern plateau of Mauna Kea.

The project is estimated to cost \$1.1 billion, a figure that will increase if the project hits any delays along the way.

"I'm very opposed to it," Trask said. "I'm part of the Sierra Club initiative with Nelson Ho (now deputy director of the Department of Environmental Management), and later became involved in the contested case 10 or 12 years ago."

Trask spoke of her past battles to get an "integrated culture and resource management plan for the island so we can determine the carrying capacity."

Citing the 13 telescopes on Mauna Kea, some of them defunct, and growing numbers of tourists, Trask said the mountain has already reached its capacity.

"The IfA has destroyed our areas of worship," Trask said, referring to the University of Hawaii's Institute for Astronomy.

Trask is prepared to go forward with litigation if the contested case effort fails.

"I'm not going to be one of the people who's going to be pushed around," she said. "I really don't see how this (project) is going to fly because the alternate site in Chile is ready to go."

The Chilean mountain, Cerro Armazones, is located in a remote spot in the north of the country and has no infrastructure. Atmospheric conditions in Hawaii compare favorably to the Chilean site. But the government of Chile is promoting astronomy as an industry, the environmental assessment process is finishing this week (a version of that document, translated into English, is also being created), and the mountain in Chile has no archaeological, historical or cultural significance.

The situation is different at Mauna Kea, which is both the highest point in the Pacific Ocean and one of the most sacred places in Hawaii. The mountain is believed to belong to Wakea, the sky-father, and the summit area is regarded as the realm of the four snow goddesses, including Poliahu.

Another former OHA trustee, Moanikeala Akaka, echoed Trask's opposition to the telescope. Both wahine have been vocal proponents of Hawaiian rights and have fought for just compensation of revenue from ceded lands.

Akaka noted that the partners involved in TMT have existing stakes in other telescopes on Mauna Kea -- in particular, the Canada-France-Hawaii Telescope, the W.M. Keck Observatory and the Caltech Submillimeter Observatory.

"There shouldn't be any more of a footprint on the mountain," she said, adding later, "It has been, since time immemorial, a very, very sacred place for our people."

Noting the Chilean people have no historical or cultural issues at Cerro Armazones, Akaka said there is "too much up there (on Mauna Kea) already. It's just a little city."

The EIS preparation notice will be released Sept. 8, when specifics on a series of public meetings around the Big Island will be announced.

Moana Tavares, a Sierra Club member and Republican candidate for the state House of Representatives, disagreed with a published comment by a TMT director that "the astronomy endeavor is not very different

from the Native Hawaiian reverence for the mountain."

"I was wondering who he knows in the Hawaiian community," Tavares said. "I question people who are not from here that come and say they know about the Hawaiian community."

Tavares said she was "very hesitant" to support the Office of Mauna Kea Management because it's supervised by the University of Hawaii.

She also knocked the lack of transparency from the university and the military, and "had a feeling" the military was behind the telescope. TMT officials have previously said the telescope project is a nonprofit undertaking with no federal association.

Tavares is running against incumbent Rep. Clift Tsuji, a Democrat.

Kealoha Pisciotta, president of Mauna Kea Anaina Hou, said there is "no legal justification for considering expansion" of the telescopes on the mountain before the completion of the Mauna Kea Comprehensive Management Plan, as required by court order.

A draft plan may be released in October, with final approval coming in December; the TMT's EIS process must wait until the management plan is completed.

Only when the EIS is completed can the TMT board decide whether to build the telescope on Mauna Kea or Cerro Armazones.

"I don't think there should be new telescope footprints on the mountain," said Cory Harden, who said the observatory would spoil the view of the plateau. "I think it should go to Chile. Enough already."