

## Thirty Meter Telescope

### Telescope hearings slated; activists promise opposition

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Big Island residents will have an opportunity in October to air their opinion about basing the world's most advanced telescope atop the summit of Mauna Kea.

The Thirty Meter Telescope will have the ability to study objects too faint or too distant to observe with existing facilities and will be a key tool for answering many compelling scientific questions.

Proposed by the University of California, California Institute of Technology and the Association of Canadian Universities for Research in Astronomy, the telescope would have a resolution many times greater than that of the Hubble Space Telescope.

"The TMT would be capable of investigating a broad range of questions, including the search for life on planets outside our solar system, the physics of planet and star formation, and how the very first galaxies form and evolved," according to the environmental impact statement preparation notice.

Public scoping meetings to begin the process of assembling an environmental impact statement regarding the estimated \$1.1 billion project will take place during October across the Big Island and in Honolulu.

According to the U.S. National Research Council, a 2001 survey of astronomers concluded there is a critical need for a telescope with a 30-meter primary mirror. As a result, TMT Observatory Corp., a nonprofit company, was formed to manage initial project planning, and then design, build and operate the Thirty Meter Telescope.

A worldwide survey also concluded that the best locations for the telescope were either Mauna Kea or Cerro Armazones in Chile's Atacama Desert.

If built atop Mauna Kea, the telescope would be built within the Science Reserve on the northern plateau, a relatively flat lava flow plateau below the summit ridge cinder cones. According to the corporation, the dome of the telescope would not be able to be seen from most vantage points around the mountain.

The project has gained the support of U.S. Sen. Dan Inouye, who said the loss of the project would diminish Hawaii's standing as one of the world's premiere astronomy venues. He has proposed scholarships for Hawaiian students as part of an initiative to gain public support for the project.

But any nontraditional activities at the summit of Mauna Kea have been questioned by some Native Hawaiian activists who say it is sacred land. Pro-sovereignty advocate and attorney Mililani Trask said she will seek a contested-case hearing and litigation to halt the project.

The Sierra Club has also questioned the carrying capacity of the 14,000-foot summit, home to various animals and plants, including the endangered wekiu bug.

Among other things, potential impacts on biological resources will be evaluated in the draft EIS, according to the corporation. Impacts of both the observatory structures and associated ancillary facilities will be considered, including construction staging areas, access roads and other areas within the zone of construction.

Some activists have also pointed out that the telescope would be used for military applications. However, the corporation denies any connection with military uses. Others question the \$1 a year rent paid by the University of Hawaii for use of the summit.



An artist's rendering of the Thirty Meter Telescope. The telescope will have the ability to study objects too faint or too distant to observe with existing facilities and will be a key tool for answering many compelling scientific questions. - University Of California

The final decision on whether to allow the telescope on Mauna Kea rests with the Board of Land and Natural Resources. However, the Land Board must first accept the University of Hawaii's comprehensive management plan before it considers the telescope.

It is anticipated that a draft of the management plan will be available for public review in October. It will then be submitted to the Mauna Kea Management Board for review in November, and finally the Land Board in December for final review and approval.

#### How to voice your opinion

The University of Hawaii at Hilo is actively soliciting community concerns and input on the Thirty Meter Telescope on Mauna Kea. Supporters of the project hope to have the telescope in operation within a decade.

A scoping process for an environmental impact statement for the telescope has already begun with the publication of the EIS preparation notice on Sept. 23. The notice is available at <http://hawaii.gov/health/environmental/oeqc/index.html/> by clicking on "Online Library," then "Hawaii" and scrolling down to "2008-09-23 HA EISPN Thirty Meter Telescope." The document is also available at libraries.

An initial 30-day period following the publication of the notice is the first opportunity to voice an opinion concerning the proposed telescope.

Comments may be made in one of four ways:

- To the accepting agencies found in the notice;
- Online at <http://www.TMT-HawaiiEIS.org/participate/>;
- By telephone at 1-866-284-1716;
- Public meetings at: Kohala High School cafeteria, 5-8 p.m. Oct. 6; Kahilu Town Hall, Waimea 5-8 p.m., Oct. 8; and
- Kealakehe Elementary School cafeteria, Kona, 5-8 p.m. Oct. 9; Ka'u High and Pahala Elementary School cafeteria, 6-9 p.m. Oct. 13; Keaukaha Elementary School Cafeteria, Hilo, 6-9 p.m. Oct. 14; Pahoa High School, Puna, 5-8 p.m. Oct. 15; and Neal S. Blaisdell Center, Pikake Room, Honolulu, 5-9 p.m. Oct. 16.

Information about the Comprehensive Management Plan for Mauna Kea may be found at <http://www.maunakeacmp.com/>.

The TMT Observatory Corp. has its own Web site at <http://www.tmt.org/>.