# Forestry—An Economically Viable Program for Hawai'i

Senator Daniel K. Akaka

Aloha! I am grateful to the Hawai'i Forest Industry Association for your continued support of this symposium. I want to thank Andrea Beck, Executive Director of the Hawai'i Forest Industry Association, for inviting me to speak to you today.

I believe the issues to be discussed at your symposium will have profound implications for future economic development in Hawai'i. Without question, the closing of our sugar plantations is an economic challenge facing Hawai'i today. We must seek long-term, productive altematives for idle cane acreage and other available agricultural acreage. As we search for new ventures to make productive use of these lands, we must identify opportunities capable of providing economic benefits over long periods, similar to what sugar provided for Hawai'i. The opportunities we choose must keep rural Hawai'i green and economically productive.

Forestry can provide us with some of the answers for sustained economic development and diversification. As a renewable resource, forestry opens exciting opportunities for new products and new markets for Hawai'i export. Using available lands in Hamakua, for example, we can create a stable forest products industry, based on high value tropical and uniquely Hawaiian species such as koa, sandalwood, kou, and kauila. The challenge is to develop a strategic mix of short-rotation tree crops with high value and longer-rotation hardwoods.

Koa is the monarch of the Hawaiian forest. It's the largest native tree and the second most common. Koa is widely distributed in both dry and rain forests, from 600 to 7000 feet in elevation, though most koa forests, which are important habitat for rare birds, have been disturbed by grazing and other human-induced influences. Associated with the power of Hawaiian Ali'i, used for powerful war canoes and house timbers, the tree has been revered over the ages. Valued today at $3.00 per board foot on the stump in the forest, and up to ten times that as boards ready for use, koa is the king of Hawaiian woods, the single most valuable species in trade within Hawai'i. Koa's current market value is a reflection of its relative scarcity as much as of its beauty and name. Like so many other gifts of nature, we have not valued it until trees of sufficient size for wood products have become scarce, and until undisturbed koa forests exist only in isolated, highly protected areas.

I have been actively working in Congress to help forestry in Hawai'i. In 1992, the Hawai'i Tropical Forest Recovery Act, legislation I authored, was signed into law. The thrust of this legislation, as you know, is to reverse the tragic decline of Hawai'i's ailing tropical forests and put them on the road to recovery. Among other things, it provides for a Hawai'i Tropical Forest Recovery Task Force charged with the responsibility of submitting an action plan to Congress.

Last year, Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman released the Tropical Forestry Plan, which identifies opportunities to rejuvenate Hawai'i's tropical forests and the potential for forest resource development. Hopefully, through the joint efforts of govemment and private industry, we will succeed in developing an economically viable forestry program in Hawai'i.

I also want to talk about a serious problem facing Hawai'i's forests. We all know that alien plants, animals, and pests are serious threats. Last year, on federal lands throughout the United States, we lost 4500 acres each day to noxious pests and weeds. That's a million-and-a-half acres a year, or an area three times the size of the State of Hawai'i. By comparison, forest fires, one of the most fearsome natural disasters, claimed only half as many federal acres as weeds and pests.

This problem affects all 50 states, but nowhere is it more serious than in Hawai'i. Because of our climate, Hawai'i is heaven-on-earth for pests and weeds. Gorse, ivy gourd, miconia, and banana poka are ravaging our forests, fields, and watersheds. This year, for the first time, foreign-introduced plants outnumber Hawai'i's rich heritage of native species.

Invasive foreign weeds and pests do more than just compete with Hawai'i's domestic species. They transform the landscape. They change the rules by which native plants and animals live. And, they undermine the

economic and environmental health of our state.

We need to address this problem to be sure we have a forest of healthy trees and not a forest of miconia. Miconia can spread like wildfire. We want healthy forests in Hawai'i instead of healthy miconia, which has overwhelmed and destroyed some South Pacific islands. That's why I introduced legislation, "The Plant Protection Act," this year to revise and consolidate federal laws that control plant pests and noxious weeds. That is what brought Deputy Secretary Richard Rominger of the Department of Agriculture and other federal officials to Hawai'i last month. They saw for themselves what alien pests and weeds can do to Hawai'i. But legislation alone won't solve this problem. Without a sustained public and private strategy there is no hope of stemming the flow of alien species.

I wish all of you a very successful symposium and best wishes. You can count on my continued support for your efforts. Mahalo!