



News Release

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University of Hawai'i Sea Grant College Program hosts summit on rainwater runoff and green communities

Honolulu, HI – Hawai'i's ocean users lament the time following medium to heavy rains across the islands and subsequent brown water advisories recommending not recreating for a day or two (or three!). These advisories are the consequence of rainwater runoff, or stormwater. Stormwater runoff is the result of rainwater flowing over compact ground and other impervious surfaces into streams, ponds, storm drains, and the sea, and has been cited as the number one source of pollution in the state of Hawai'i. In Hawai'i, storm sewer pipes are separate from waste sewer pipes, and as a result, anything (water or otherwise) that enters the stormwater drainage system flows – untreated – directly to a stream or the ocean impacting water quality and nearshore environments.

Practices and techniques to manage and utilize these water resources before it enters the storm sewer system include low impact development (LID) and green stormwater infrastructure (GSI) practices, rainwater catchment, and a multitude of building and plumbing techniques for water capture, recycling, and reuse. In addition to the regulation of stormwater management at the parcel and building scale (e.g., infiltration, green/blue roofs, cisterns/rain barrels, rainwater and gray water reuse), there are opportunities for interventions within the public right-of-way (ROW) (e.g., biofiltration, street trees, flow through planters, and permeable surfaces that can provide multiple benefits, including aesthetics, urban ecological systems, and enhanced environmental conditions for walking and bicycling. These strategies are more and more becoming required by regulations and plans.

There are real difficulties in addressing stormwater infrastructure – the system of landscapes, curbs, and pipes that transport rainfall runoff makai. To begin to address these challenges, experts from across the state and the nation convened in Honolulu for a day-long summit to discuss how to achieve green and livable communities, with a specific focus on water quality (polluted runoff control) and quantity (catchment, recharge, flooding, and drought).

At the event, Hawai'i State Senator Mike Gabbard, who currently serves as chair of the Senate Committee on Water, Land, and Agriculture, and Hawai'i Community Foundation's Josh Stanbro provided the opening remarks. The summit was moderated by Geoffrey Anderson, president and CEO of Smart Growth America, and Matthew Gonser, an extension agent with Hawai'i Sea Grant who focuses on community planning and design.

In addition to many local experts, other invited guests included experts from the City of Seattle Office of Sustainability & Environment and Seattle Public Utilities, Center for Watershed Protection in Maryland, the Boston office of The Trust for Public Land, the U.S. Water Alliance in Washington D.C., and the Horsley Witten Group in Massachusetts.

“Hawai‘i is the ideal location to hold this important summit of local experts and national leaders to discuss water management” noted Senator Gabbard. “By bringing together landscape architects, planners, engineers, university researchers, government officials, policymakers, and others, we are working to develop collaborative solutions that will address concerns we have today, and also anticipate the challenges we will face in years to come”

The University of Hawai‘i Sea Grant College Program (Hawaii Sea Grant) organized the summit with an award from the National Sea Grant College Program. Additional sponsorship was provided by the Hawai‘i Community Foundation, City and County of Honolulu Department of Planning and Permitting, Transit-Oriented Development Division (TOD Honolulu), AECOM, and the Hawai‘i Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects.

For additional information, please visit: <http://sbcd.seagrant.soest.hawaii.edu/green-stormwater-infrastructure-summit>, or contact, Matthew Gonser, gonserm@hawaii.edu, (808) 956-2872.

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The University of Hawai‘i Sea Grant College Program is part of the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa’s prestigious School of Ocean and Earth Science and Technology. It supports an innovative program of research, education and extension services directed to the improved understanding and stewardship of coastal and marine resources of the state, region and nation. Science serving Hawai‘i and the Pacific since 1968.