
Mauna Kea - a Dormant Volcano in Hawaii

Nearly 4,000 kilometers off of California's coast, the big island of Hawai'i is home to Mauna Kea- a dormant volcano that is the second-highest point above sea level. To Native Hawaiians, the mountain is a sacred place, as, in ancient times, it was thought to be the home of the Gods and was used as a burial ground for chiefs of the highest standing. Today, it is still highly revered by the Hawaiian people as the home to 19 endangered species and an area mostly untouched by the hands of colonization and development. However, to the rest of the world, Mauna Kea is simply regarded as one of the best summits on Earth for astronomical study due to its high altitude and low levels of light pollution and, in 2009, plans for the "Thirty Meter Telescope," also known as TMT, were formed.

This "next-generation telescope," thought to be groundbreaking in the world of astronomy, was met with heavy resistance from Native Hawaiians who, to this day, refuse to allow further desecration of a land that is so vital to their culture and ecosystem. After going through the State of Hawai'i Supreme Court, the issue is still currently being debated and is widely split between those staunchly for it and those radically opposed. However, the true solution to this issue is a compromise between the two sides. THESIS: As the project stands, TMT should not be built as it infringes on conservation efforts, will likely have a negative effect on tourism, and blatantly ignores the cultural significance of the land.

It is an undisputed fact the the construction of TMT would result in an impact on the surrounding environment with both the structure and the process of building. As previously stated, Mauna Kea is home to 19 different endangered species. An example of this is Mauna Kea Silversword, a plant that, at one point, had a known population of a meager 50 and is still endangered. There have already been Hawaiian native species that have gone extinct from the wild and are currently trying to be reintroduced, such as the Hawaiian Crow. The plans for TMT have the telescope taking up 18 stories and nearly 1.5 acres, making it virtually impossible that the construction will not interfere with the delicate environment of the mountain and its inhabitants.

Therefore, although astronomy is an important field and should be pursued, it is vastly more pertinent that life on Earth be prioritized over looking for extraterrestrial life that may not even exist. The Thirty Meter Telescope is not the first revolutionary of its kind to seek a home on the dormant volcano. Astronomers have been building telescopes on the land since the late 1960s. Even back then, locals were against the idea but the Hawaiian government, seeking a chance to promote investment from outside companies, encouraged scientists to use the land. Today, the mountain is already home to 13 different observatories but researchers are demanding more. However, unlike previous attempts at stopping the construction, the Natives now hold more power. Due to the rise of technology and quick news, the public outcry of the Hawaiian people are stirring up controversy worldwide.

Cultural significance

The cultural significance of Mauna Kea vastly outweigh any benefits that could possibly come from the venture. Due to the states lengthy and charged history with colonization, many protestors to the project see it as a act of colonial suppression. This is, in part, because the

sponsors for TMT include universities from California, Japan, China, Canada but, notably, not Hawai'i itself, although the University of Hawai'i in Manoa has one of the top astronomy programs worldwide. A writer from Business Insider stated that, to the Hawaiian people, the project "seems like just another example of a foreign influence stepping in and doing whatever it likes with land that does not belong to them" (Dickerson). The Natives have no issue with the telescope itself but, rather with the way it was proposed and with the lack of care it gave to the land on which it would rest. By taking a stand against TMT, what Hawaiians are really trying to say is that it is their land and should be their decision. Therefore, unless TMT can find a way to collaborate and compromise with the wishes of the the Natives, the telescope should not be built.

Some may argue that, instead of bringing harm to the natives, the project will actually bring an enormous economic boom to the state. However, that may not be the case. As previously stated, the projected height of the building will be 18-stories and will likely be extremely visible given the small nature of the island. Many have raised concerns that the building will interfere with the picturesque and wild beauty of the land and, therefore, have a negative effect on tourism. In a state where tourism is the biggest source of gross domestic product, anything that threatens the booming industry is taken very seriously. Another point being made by those in favour of the building is that the \$1.4 billion project is estimated to be providing \$150 million to the economy and create 140 engineering and technology jobs (Overbye). However, it is also important to note that, in creating and managing the previous 13 telescopes on the island, the majority of jobs came from workers that were relocated to Hawai'i. In other words, it was not truly the Hawaiians receiving the benefit of the jobs and would likely be the same for TMT. The \$150 million would surely help the economy but it is important to ask: would the financial gain be worth the environmental and cultural ramifications?