

# Hawai'i Wildfire Prevention/Mitigation/Response Federal Resources and Assistance

April 2024



## Goal

Strengthen, modify and where necessary create federal programs to assist Hawai'i in preventing, mitigating and responding to wildfires.

## Key Entities

### Federal

- **Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA):** Lead federal agency to fund and implement disaster prevention, mitigation, response and recovery.
- **U.S. Fire Administration:** Lead federal agency for fire data collection, public fire education, fire research and fire service training.
- **U.S. Forest Service:** Supports funding for wildfire mitigation and risk management, forest health and other wildfire issues, primarily but not exclusively on federal forest lands.
- **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service/National Park Service:** Lead federal agencies for fire risk/response on federally managed lands in Hawai'i.
- **Federal firefighters:** Federal employees engaged by federal services for firefighting prevention, mitigation and response on federal lands, often military-owned or managed.
- **U.S. Army Hawai'i:** Retains firefighters trained to combat wildfires as well as equipment such as helicopters available for such purposes.
- **U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development:** Supports rural communities' economic development efforts and maintains and improves healthy rural populations by providing loans and grants to local governments, non-profit organizations and individuals for housing, utility, and business growth and recovery.
- **U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD):** HUD implements federal disaster assistance after a Presidentially declared disaster, provides housing for displaced persons, and provides additional support for ongoing recovery through

programs and partnerships allowing new housing construction, rental assistance, property repairs.

- **U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA):** Integrates the expertise of the federal government to help local, state and tribal governments and the private sector sustain and/or rebuild businesses and employment. Develops economic opportunities that result in sustainable and economically resilient communities after large-scale and catastrophic incidents.
- **U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA):** Connects individuals, businesses, and private non-profits with SBA disaster assistance programs. Improves disaster recovery outcomes and economic resilience by helping communities prepare for, respond to, recover from, and mitigate disasters of all kinds.

### State

- **Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency (HI-EMA):** Plans for and responds to both natural and human-caused emergencies; also the coordinating agency on emergencies of all kinds between federal and local agencies, including the four county emergency management agencies.
- **Hawai'i Department of Land and Natural Resources – Division of Forestry and Wildlife (DOFAW):** The primary responder for wildfires on state lands managed by DOFAW, which is some 26% of land statewide; co-responds with county fire departments and federal agencies on an additional 32% of land statewide; resulting in DOFAW fire response for nearly 60% of land statewide. Funding for DOFAW Fire Management comes through the state general fund and federal cost share programs through the U.S. Forest Service.

### County (here the City and County of Honolulu, but comparable entities in other counties)

- **Honolulu Department of Emergency Management:** Coordinates preparedness and response plans, programs, and initiatives with city, state, federal, private, corporate and non-government entities.
- **Honolulu Fire Department (HFD):** Shares responsibility and response for various wildfires.

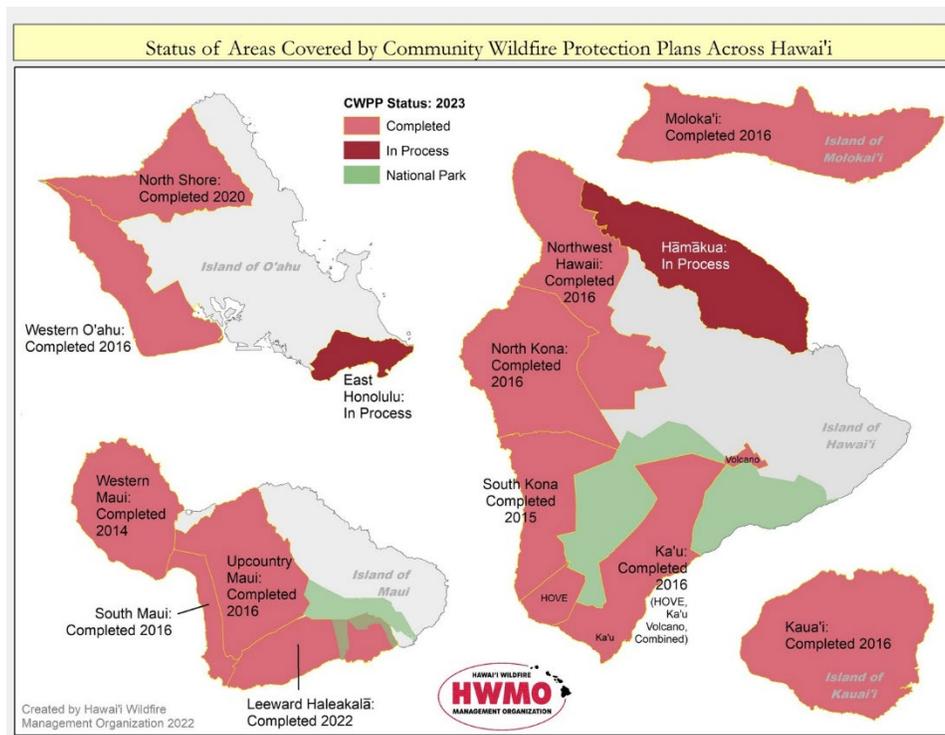
### Non-Government Entities

- **Hawai'i Wildfire Management Organization:** Works with communities across Hawai'i on wildfire prevention, mitigation and response planning activities.

- Natural Disaster Preparedness Training Center (NDPTC):** The Center is a member of the National Domestic Preparedness Consortium (NDPC), which was expanded in 2007 to address all-hazards capabilities. The NDPTC is authorized to develop and deliver training and educational programs related to homeland security and disaster management, with a specific focus on natural hazards, coastal communities, and the special needs and opportunities of islands and territories.

**Key State, County and Community Assessments, Plans and Recommendations**

- State Hazard Mitigation Plan:** The 2023 State Hazard Mitigation Plan identifies the major natural hazards that affect Hawai‘i, assesses the risks that each hazard poses, analyzes the vulnerability of people, property and infrastructure to the specific hazard, and recommends actions to reduce risk and vulnerability to the hazard. The State Hazard Mitigation Plan also contains a description of programs, policy, statutes and regulations applicable to hazard mitigation.
- Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs):** CWPPs are collaborative, community-driven, hyper-local frameworks that outline local priorities for wildfire risk mitigation. There are 16 CWPPs currently in place in Hawai‘i (see figure below), although only two for O‘ahu (West O‘ahu and North Shore). East Honolulu is currently developing a plan. Federal funding is available through the U.S. Forest Service to develop, revise or implement CWPPs.



- **City and County Multi-Hazard Pre-Disaster Mitigation Plan:** The multi-hazard mitigation plan provides a strategy to reduce loss of property or life caused by natural hazard events for the City and County of Honolulu. The multi-hazard strategy presented in this plan addresses the relationship among various types of hazards, evaluates the effects of climate change, and prioritizes mitigation policies, actions and projects.

## Key Areas for Federal Government Assistance

- Invasive grasses management
- Land management coordination
- Funding to implement practices for hazard mitigation
- Federal competitive grant opportunities
- Local capacity for grant management
- Technical assistance navigating both federal funding and implementing best wildfire management practices
- Lack of wildland fire training
- Personnel and equipment shortages

## Existing Federal Programs

- **FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grant Funding:** FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, Hazard Mitigation Grant Program Post Fire, and Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) program provide funding to state and local governments to reduce or mitigate disaster losses in communities.
- **FEMA Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Program:** SAFER provides federal funding directly to fire departments and volunteer firefighter interest organizations to help them increase or maintain the number of trained, "front line" firefighters available in their communities.
- **FEMA Assistance to Firefighters Grants Program:** These fire safety grants fund critically needed resources to equip and train emergency personnel, enhance efficiencies and support community resilience.
- **FEMA Public Assistance Grant:** The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Public Assistance grant program provides federal assistance to state and local governments and certain types of private nonprofit organizations following a presidential disaster declaration so that communities can quickly respond to and recover. Through the grant program, FEMA provides supplemental federal disaster grant assistance for debris removal, life-saving emergency protective measures and the repair, replacement or restoration of disaster-damaged publicly owned facilities and the facilities of certain private nonprofit organizations. The Public Assistance program also encourages

protection of these damaged facilities from future events by providing assistance for hazard mitigation measures during the recovery process.

- **FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grant Program:** The FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grant Program provides funding to state, local, tribal and territorial governments so they can develop hazard mitigation plans and rebuild in a way that mitigates or reduces future disaster losses in their communities. This grant funding is available after a presidentially declared disaster.
- **U.S. Forest Service State Fire Assistance:** The State Fire Assistance account provides financial and technical support directly to the states, to enhance firefighting capacity, support community-based hazard mitigation and expand outreach and education to homeowners and communities concerning fire prevention. This not only includes assistance to local fire agencies, but also community-based wildfire hazard mitigation efforts, fire plan development and fire adapted ecosystem restoration. This is a formula fund.
- **U.S. Forest Service Joint Fire Science Program:** This program supports the Joint Fire Science Program Fire Science Exchange Network, a national collaboration of fifteen regional fire science exchanges that provide the most relevant, current wildland fire science information to federal, state, local, tribal and private stakeholders within ecologically similar regions. The network brings fire managers, practitioners and scientists together to address regional fire management needs and challenges. In Hawai‘i, this takes the form of the Pacific Fire Exchange which is co-led by the Hawai‘i Wildfire Management Organization and the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa.
- **U.S. Forest Service Volunteer Fire Assistance:** The Volunteer Fire Assistance Program helps to organize, train and equip fire departments. This grant program is designed to enhance rural wildfire management and response to help protect homes, families and the natural environment.
- **U.S. Forest Service Community Wildfire Defense Grant Program:** The Community Wildfire Defense Grant Program was authorized and funded in the 2022 Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and provides grants to communities at risk from wildfire to develop or revise their community wildfire protection plans and carry out projects described within those plans. Funding is available for a five-year period, from Fiscal Year 2022 through Fiscal Year 2026. Funding can be secured for \$250,000 for the creation or updating of a community wildfire protection plan or \$10 million for a project described within a community wildfire protection plan less than ten years old.
- **U.S. Forest Service Landscape Scale Restoration:** The Landscape Scale Restoration Program is a Forest Service State and Private Forestry competitive grant program that promotes collaborative, science-based restoration of priority forest landscapes and furthers priorities identified in State Forest Action Plans or equivalent restoration

strategies. Landscape Scale Restoration projects cross multiple jurisdictions, including Tribal, state and local government, and private forest land, to address large-scale issues such as wildfire risk reduction, watershed protection and restoration, and the spread of invasive species, insect infestation and disease.

- **U.S. Forest Service Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP):** State and local governments, and non-profits can apply to obtain targeted conservation funding to address specific natural resource challenges. A majority of RCPP funding is provided directly to producers and landowners who implement conservation measures or place conservation easements on private lands. This funding can be used creatively for land management to reduce fire risk.
- **U.S. Department of the Interior Grants for Voluntary Restoration:** Administered through the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, this broad program includes broad priorities to strengthen ecosystem and community resilience. Funding can be used to conserve and restore natural systems that help ecosystems and/or communities respond to, mediate, and recover from disturbances such as floods, wildfire, drought (e.g., enhancing a wetland to improve coastal resilience, invasive species prevention or removal to reduce wildfire risk, restoring fire resilient stand structure and species composition in fire prone forests, water conservation to address drought, expansion of wetlands to protect from flooding, grassland restoration to promote natural prairie ecosystems).
- **U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development Rural Community Development Initiative Grants:** RCDI grants are awarded to help non-profit housing and community development organizations, low-income rural communities and federally recognized tribes to support housing, community facilities and community and economic development projects in rural areas.
- **U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development Single Family Housing Guaranteed Loan Program:** The Section 502 Guaranteed Loan Program assists approved lenders in providing low- and moderate-income households the opportunity to own adequate, modest, decent, safe and sanitary dwellings as their primary residence in eligible rural areas. Eligible applicants may purchase, build, rehabilitate, improve or relocate a dwelling in an eligible rural area with 100% financing. The program provides a 90% loan note guarantee to approved lenders to reduce the risk of extending 100% loans to eligible rural homebuyers – no money down for those who qualify.
- **U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development Single Family Housing Direct Home Loans:** The Section 502 Direct Loan Program assists low- and very-low-income applicants obtain decent, safe and sanitary housing in eligible rural areas by providing payment assistance to increase the applicant’s repayment ability. Payment assistance is a type of subsidy that reduces the mortgage payment for a short time. The amount of assistance is determined by the adjusted family income.

- U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development Single Family Housing Repair Loans & Grants:** The Section 504 Housing Repair program provides loans to very-low-income homeowners to repair, improve or modernize their homes, and provides grants to elderly very-low-income homeowners to remove health and safety hazards.
- U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development Single Family Housing Repair Loans & Grants in Presidentially Declared Disasters Pilot:** The Section 504 Home Repair Loans & Grants in Presidentially Declared Disasters Pilot program provides loans and grants to very-low-income homeowners to repair disaster-related home damage. The pilot program has expanded to include any presidentially declared disasters which occurred on or after July 18, 2022 (i.e. not limited to the pilot states outlined in the original notice). The conclusion of the pilot program is on July 18, 2025.
- U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development Multifamily Housing Direct Loans:** This program provides competitive financing for affordable multi-family rental housing for low-income, elderly, or disabled individuals and families in eligible rural areas. These funds may be used for the construction, improvement and purchase of multi-family rental housing.
- U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development Multifamily Housing Loan Guarantees:** This program works with qualified private-sector lenders to provide financing to qualified borrowers to increase the supply of affordable rental housing for low- and moderate-income individuals and families in eligible rural areas and towns. These funds may be used for the construction, improvement and purchase of multi-family rental housing.
- U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development Electric Infrastructure Loan & Loan Guarantee Program:** The electric infrastructure program makes insured loans and loan guarantees to nonprofit and cooperative associations, public bodies, and other utilities. Insured loans primarily finance the construction of electric distribution facilities in rural areas. The guaranteed loan program has been expanded and is now available to finance generation, transmission, and distribution facilities, including system improvements and replacements required to furnish and improve electric service in rural areas, as well as demand side management, energy conservation programs, and on-grid and off-grid renewable energy systems.
- U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development Community Facilities Direct Loan & Grant Program:** This program provides affordable funding to develop essential community facilities in rural areas. An essential community facility is defined as a facility that provides an essential service to the local community for the orderly development of the community in a primarily rural area, and does not include private, commercial or business undertakings. Some examples include libraries, police stations,

police vehicles, town halls, street improvements, medical clinics, nursing homes, food pantries and community kitchens.

- **U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development Community Facilities Guaranteed Loan Program:** This program provides loan guarantees to eligible lenders such as credit unions, savings banks, bank for cooperatives, and federal and state-chartered banks to develop essential community facilities in rural areas. An essential community facility is defined as a public improvement, operated on a non-profit basis, needed for the orderly development of a rural community where the rural community is a city or town, or its equivalent county or multi-county area. The term “facility” refers to both the physical structure financed, and the resulting service provided to rural residents or rural businesses.
- **U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development Emergency Community Water Assistance Grants:** This program helps eligible communities prepare, or recover from, an emergency that threatens the availability of safe, reliable drinking water. It helps prevent damage or restore households’ and business’ access to clean, reliable drinking water in eligible rural areas and towns following natural disasters. Funding can improve the natural environment and encourage manufacturers and other businesses to locate or expand operations.
- **U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development Water & Waste Disposal Loan & Grant Program:** This program provides funding for clean and reliable drinking water systems, sanitary sewage disposal, sanitary solid waste disposal, and storm water drainage to households and businesses in eligible rural areas.
- **U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development Rural Business Development Grants:** The purpose of the program is to promote economic development and job creation projects through the awarding of grant funds to eligible entities. Applications will compete in two separate categories, business opportunity grants and business enterprise grants, for use in funding various business and community projects that serve rural areas.
- **U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery Grant Funds:** Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) grant funds are appropriated by Congress and allocated by HUD to rebuild disaster-impacted areas and provide crucial seed money to start the long-term recovery process. These flexible grants help cities, counties, tribes, and states recover from Presidentially declared disasters, especially in low-income areas, subject to availability of supplemental appropriations. Since CDBG-DR assistance may fund a broad range of recovery activities, HUD can help communities and neighborhoods that otherwise might not recover due to limited resources.

- U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Community Development Block Grant Mitigation Program:** The Community Development Block Grant Mitigation (CDBG-MIT) Program funds assist eligible grantees in areas impacted by recent disasters to carry out strategic and high-impact activities to mitigate disaster risks and reduce future losses. The CDBG-MIT program defines mitigation projects as activities that increase resilience to disasters and reduce or eliminate the long-term risk of loss of life, injury, damage to and loss of property, and suffering and hardship, by lessening the impact of future disasters. CDBG-MIT activities should align with other federal programs that address hazard mitigation to create a more cohesive effort at the federal, state, and local level.
- U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Section 108 Loan Guarantee Program:** This program allows local governments to leverage portions of their CDBG funds into federally guaranteed loans large enough to pursue physical and economic revitalization projects capable of redeveloping entire neighborhoods. Public investment is often needed to inspire private economic activity, providing initial resources or simply the confidence that private firms and individuals may need to invest in distressed areas. Local governments borrowing funds guaranteed by HUD through the Section 108 Program must pledge their current and future CDBG allocations as security for the loan, however, the goal of the program is for projects to have sufficient cash flow to repay the loan without any need for current or future CDBG contributions.
- U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Mutual Self-Help Housing Technical Assistance Grants:** Provides grants to qualified organizations to help them carry out local self-help housing construction projects. Grant recipients supervise groups of very-low- and low-income individuals and families as they construct their own homes in rural areas. Group members provide most of the construction labor on each other's homes, with technical assistance from the organization overseeing the project.
- U.S. Economic Development Administration Disaster Recovery Funding:** EDA serves as the coordinating agency for the Economic Recovery Support Function (ERSF) on behalf of the Department of Commerce (DOC). In this capacity, EDA provides leadership, coordination and oversight for primary and support agencies, all of which share a role in the provision of grants, loans, training and other forms of assistance to support economic recovery efforts in disaster-impacted communities and regions.
- U.S. Small Business Administration Home Disaster Loans:** Provides loans to homeowners or renters to repair or replace disaster-damaged real estate and personal property, including automobiles.
- U.S. Small Business Administration Business Physical Disaster Loan:** Provides loans to businesses to repair or replace disaster-damaged property owned by a business, including real estate, inventories, supplies, machinery and equipment. Businesses of any

size are eligible. Private, non-profit organizations such as charities, churches, and private universities are also eligible.

- **U.S. Small Business Administration Economic Injury Disaster Loans (EIDL):** Working capital loans to help small businesses, small agricultural cooperatives, small businesses engaged in aquaculture, and most private, non-profit organizations of all sizes meet their ordinary and necessary financial obligations that cannot be met as a direct result of the disaster. These loans are intended to assist through the disaster recovery period.

## Congressional Action Items

### Appropriations (annual federal funding)

- Increase funding for key programs.
  - Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration Subcommittee – USDA Regional Conservation Partnership Program
  - Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration Subcommittee – USDA Rural Development Rural Community Development Initiative Grants
  - Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration Subcommittee – USDA Rural Development Single Family Housing Guaranteed Loan Program
  - Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration Subcommittee – USDA Rural Development Single Family Housing Direct Home Loans
  - Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration Subcommittee – USDA Rural Development Single Family Housing Repair Loans & Grants
  - Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration Subcommittee – USDA Rural Development Single Family Housing Repair Loans & Grants in Presidentially Declared Disasters Pilot
  - Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration Subcommittee – USDA Rural Development Multifamily Housing Loan Guarantees
  - Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration Subcommittee – USDA Rural Development Electric Infrastructure Loan & Loan Guarantee Program
  - Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration Subcommittee – USDA Rural Development Community Facilities Direct Loan & Grant Program
  - Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration Subcommittee – USDA Rural Development Community Facilities Guaranteed Loan Program
  - Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration Subcommittee – USDA Rural Development Emergency Community Water Assistance Grants
  - Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration Subcommittee – USDA Rural Development Water & Waste Disposal Loan & Grant Program
  - Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration Subcommittee – USDA Rural Development Rural Business Development Grants

- Commerce, Justice & Science – EDA Disaster Recovery Funding
  - Homeland Security Subcommittee – FEMA Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Program
  - Homeland Security Subcommittee – FEMA Assistance to Firefighters Grants Program
  - ⊖ Homeland Security Subcommittee – FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grant Program
  - Homeland Security Subcommittee – FEMA Public Assistance Grant
  - Interior Subcommittee– U.S. Forest Service Joint Fire Science Program
  - Interior Subcommittee – U.S. Forest Service Volunteer Fire Assistance
  - Interior Subcommittee – U.S. Forest Service State Fire Assistance
  - Interior Subcommittee – U.S. Forest Service Community Wildfire Defense Grant Program
  - Interior Subcommittee – U.S. Forest Service Landscape Scale Restoration
  - Interior Subcommittee – Department of Interior Grants for Voluntary Restoration
  - Transportation, Housing and Urban Development – HUD Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery Grant Funds (CDBG-DR)
  - Transportation, Housing and Urban Development – HUD Community Development Block Grant Mitigation Program
  - Transportation, Housing and Urban Development – HUD Section 108 Loan Guarantee Program
  - Transportation, Housing and Urban Development – HUD Mutual Self-Help Housing Technical Assistance Grants
  - Financial Services – SBA Home Disaster Loans
  - Financial Services – SBA Physical Administration Disaster Loan
  - Financial Services – SBA Economic Injury Disaster Loans
- Provide congressional directives (language) to improve key programs.
    - Homeland Subcommittee – Clear timelines for FEMA grants.
    - Homeland Subcommittee – Provide technical assistance to states on the Safeguarding Tomorrow Revolving Loan Fund.
    - Homeland Subcommittee – Increase the State and Tribal Set Aside for the BRIC program.
    - Interior Subcommittee – Encourage partnerships between federal agencies and local communities for invasive grass management.
  - Community Project Funding (project-specific Congressionally directed funding).
    - Work with the City and County Wildfire Preparedness Working Group and the State agencies involved (HFD; DEM; Office of Climate Change, Sustainability and Resiliency; DOFAW) to develop a Community Project Funding Request for wildfire mitigation activities.

### **National Defense Authorization Act (annual defense measure)**

- Through an NDAA amendment, support wildfire sensing technology for high-risk areas. The amendment would direct the DOD to study sensing technology at locations at high risk of wildfires, which can be followed with funding in later years.
- Through an NDAA amendment, leverage military-civilian joint training opportunities and Army expertise. This starts with NDAA legislation directing the DoD to study options of creating a wildfire training institute similar to the firefighting training center at PTA.

### **Other Policies**

- Require FEMA to provide clarity on grant adjudication timelines for Hazard Mitigation Grant Funding programs.
- Support robust evacuation planning and training for the institutions that care for the elderly and people with disabilities.
- Support measures to fund and assure maintenance of fire mitigation activities such as fire breaks.
- Advocate for lowering the matching cost thresholds for Fire Management Assistance Grants (FMAG) in Hawai'i or for FMAG specifically for the Maui disaster.