

Amid controversy, construction of telescope in Hawaii halted (Update)

April 7 2015, by Caleb Jones



This 2011 file artist rendering provided by Thirty Meter Telescope, shows the Thirty Meter Telescope. Hawaii Gov. David Ige said Tuesday, April 7, 2015, that the Thirty Meter Telescope is stopping construction at Mauna Kea for a week. (AP Photo/Thirty Meter Telescope)

After more than a week of demonstrations and more than a dozen arrests, Hawaii Gov. David Ige said Tuesday that the company building one of the world's largest telescopes atop Hawaii's Mauna Kea has agreed to his request to halt construction for a week.

"They have responded to my request and on behalf of the president of the University and the Office of Hawaiian Affairs have agreed to a time out on the project, and there will be no construction activities this week," Ige said at a news conference.

Thirty Meter Telescope is constructing the telescope on land that is held sacred to some Native Hawaiians. Scientists say the location is ideal for the telescope, which could allow them to see into the earliest years of the universe.

In a statement release Tuesday, Thirty Meter Telescope Project Manager Gary Sanders said "TMT agrees with Governor Ige's request for a timeout this week and an ongoing dialogue on issues."

He added that the site was "selected with great care and respect. There are no archaeological shrines or burial sites within TMT's project site. Comprehensive research by expert hydrologists confirm there is no threat to the aquifer."

Ige said he hopes the temporary pause in construction will allow the interested parties to have more discussions about the project. Native Hawaiian groups have been protesting the construction of the telescope since its inception last year.

Kealoha Pisciotto, a critic of the telescope project and protest organizer, says the governor's announcement is a positive development but opponents will continue to advocate against the project.

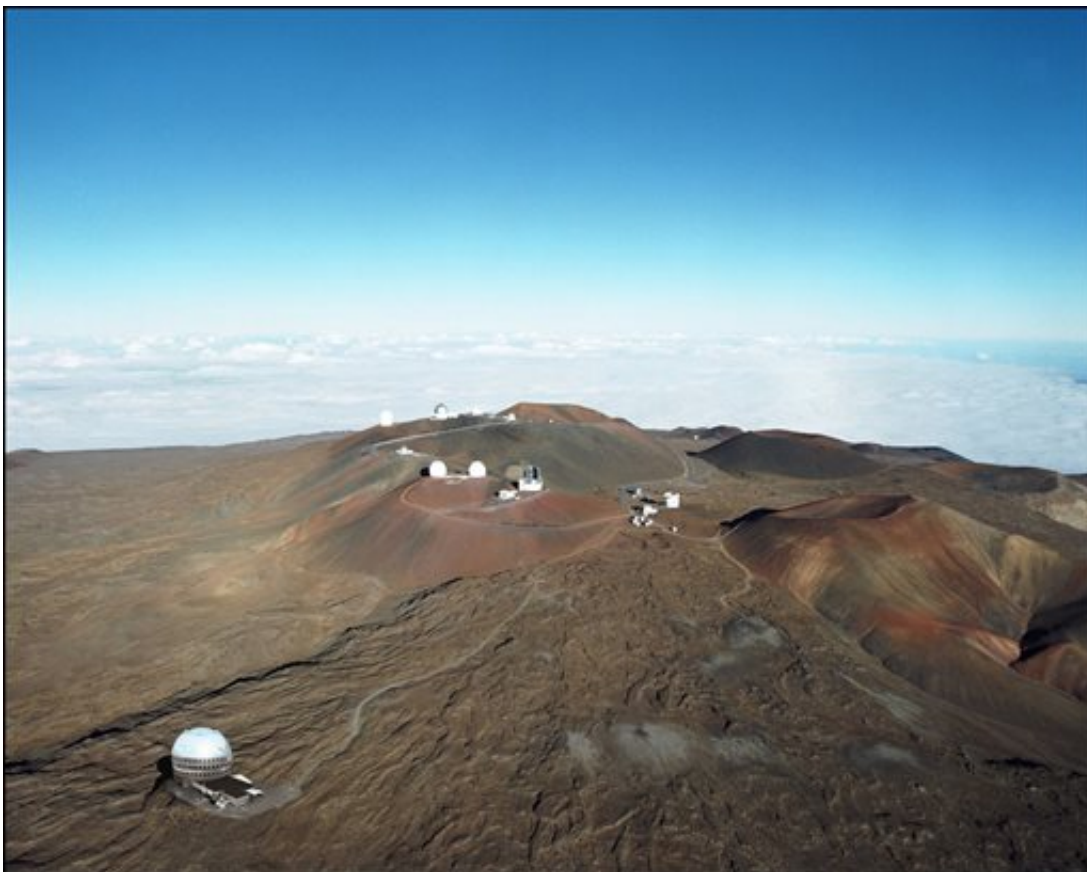


In this April 2, 2015, file photo, Department of Land and Natural Resources officers arrest a protester on the road to Thirty Meter Telescope building site on the summit of Mauna Kea in Hilo, Hawaii. Hawaii Gov. David Ige said Tuesday, April 6, that the Thirty Meter Telescope is stopping construction at Mauna Kea for a week. (AP Photo/Hawaii Tribune-Herald, Hollyn Johnson, File)

"I think that's a good sign, but he needs to understand however that we can't just stand down," said Pisciotto, president of Mauna Kea Anaina Hou. Ige "inherited these problems from the previous administration that had not done well by the people of Hawaii or the mountain."

Hundreds have recently protested the construction on the mountain, and more than a dozen people were arrested last week for blocking the road that leads to the top of the mountain.

"They did sneak up in the dark of night before, so we will maintain our presence and observation," Pisciotta said.



This undated artist rendering provided by Thirty Meter Telescope illustrates the TMT Observatory at the proposed site at the summit of Mauna Kea volcano in Hawaii. Hawaii Gov. David Ige said Tuesday, April 7, 2015, that the Thirty Meter Telescope is stopping construction at Mauna Kea for a week. (AP Photo/Thirty Meter Telescope)

University of Hawaii spokesman Dan Meisenzahl said in a telephone interview that the university is "happy that there is a dialogue happening right now and that it's obvious that it's happening at the highest levels of leadership within the University of Hawaii and within state and county

governments."

The university subleases the land on Mauna Kea to Thirty Meter Telescope for the project.

"We just want to keep the dialogue going, that's the most important thing at this time," Meisenzahl said.



In this Tuesday, Oct. 7, 2014, file photo, protesters block vehicles from getting to the Thirty Meter Telescope groundbreaking ceremony site at Mauna Kea, Hawaii. Hawaii Gov. David Ige said Tuesday, April 6, 2015, that the Thirty Meter Telescope is stopping construction at Mauna Kea for a week. (AP Photo/Hawaii Tribune-Herald, Hollyn Johnson, File)

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