

Telescope backers to resume construction on Hawaii Island

June 21 2015, by Dan Joling



This 2011 file artist rendering provided by Thirty Meter Telescope, shows the Thirty Meter Telescope. The construction of a \$1.4 billion telescope on land considered sacred by some Native Hawaiians will resume Wednesday, June 24, 2015, according to the nonprofit company behind the project. (AP Photo/Thirty Meter Telescope, File)

The construction of a \$1.4 billion telescope on land considered sacred by some Native Hawaiians will resume Wednesday, according to the nonprofit company behind the project.

Henry Yang, chairman of the Thirty Meter Telescope Observatory

Board, in a statement said the board decided to move forward after more than two months of consultations.

"Our period of inactivity has made us a better organization in the long run," Yang said. "We are now comfortable that we can be better stewards and better neighbors during our temporary and limited use of this precious land, which will allow us to explore the heavens and broaden the boundaries of science in the interest of humanity."

The telescope is planned for the summit of Mauna Kea on Hawaii's Big Island. It would be one of the world's largest telescopes.

The company suspended construction in April after law enforcement arrested protesters for blocking the road to the summit and refusing to leave the construction site.

Kealoha Pisciotta, one of the protesters, and one of six plaintiffs challenging the telescope's construction permit, said Sunday that she was shocked by Yang's announcement.

"I believe that it demonstrates a lack of good faith," she said by phone from Seattle, where she was on her way to give a talk on sacred Hawaii sites. The telescope is receiving major funding from the Gordon & Betty Moore Foundation in San Francisco. The announcement came a day after the Supreme Court of Hawaii announced it will hear oral arguments Aug. 27 on the case challenging the telescope permit, she said.

"I'm sorry to say that Mr. Moore and the Thirty Meter Telescope board are demonstrating their lack of willingness to follow the law," she said.

Yang in his statement said most of Hawaii's people support the TMT project.

"We deeply respect and are mindful of those who have concerns, and yet, we hope they will permit us to proceed with this important task while reserving their right to peaceful protest," he said.

Pisciotta said protests will continue. Yang's announcement triggered an island-wide alert for protesters, she said.

"It means that our people are going to have to be arrested, and arrested for actually trying to get the TMT to follow the law, not arrested for disobeying the law," she said.

The Mauna Kea site provides a clear view of the sky for 300 days a year, with little air and light pollution.

The telescope project was developed as a collaboration between U.S. and Canada universities and the national institutes of Japan, China and India.

Gov. David Ige in April said the Thirty Meter Telescope board is legally entitled to "use its discretion to proceed with construction." He said he respected the rights of protesters to appeal in court.

Telescope proponents spent seven years planning and seeking permits, a process that included public hearings, Ige said.

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Citation: Telescope backers to resume construction on Hawaii Island (2015, June 21) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-06-telescope-backers-resume-hawaii-island.html>

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