

# Divisive telescope to restart building next week in Hawaii

July 11 2019, by Jennifer Sinco Kelleher And Caleb Jones

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In this Oct. 7, 2014, file photo, protesters block vehicles from getting to the Thirty Meter Telescope groundbreaking ceremony site at Mauna Kea, Hawaii. Construction on the giant telescope will start again next week after lengthy court battles and passionate protests from those who say building it on Hawaii's tallest mountain will desecrate land sacred to some Native Hawaiians. State officials announced Wednesday, July 10, 2019, that the road to the top of Mauna Kea

mountain on the Big Island will be closed Monday as equipment is delivered to the construction site. (Hollyn Johnson/Hawaii Tribune-Herald via AP, File)

Construction on a giant telescope will start again next week after lengthy court battles and passionate protests from those who say building it on Hawaii's tallest mountain will desecrate land sacred to some Native Hawaiians.

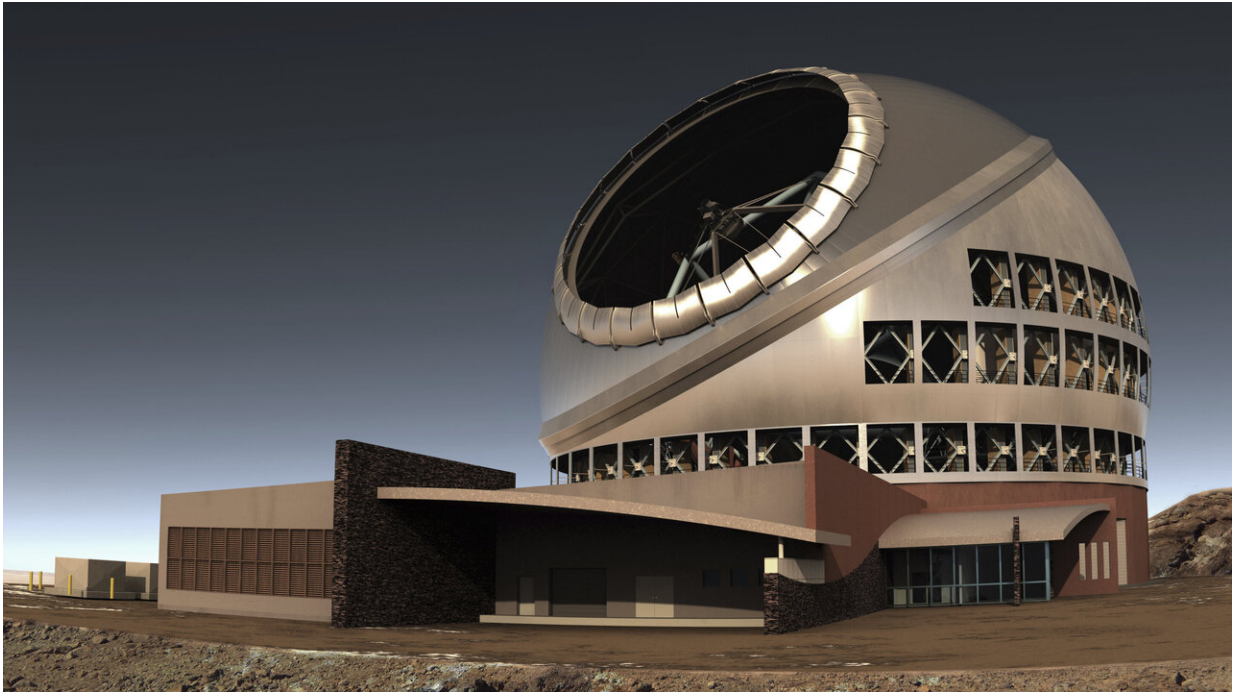
State officials announced Wednesday that the road to the top of Mauna Kea mountain on the Big Island will be closed starting Monday as equipment is delivered.

Scientists revere the mountain for its summit above the clouds that provides a clear view of the sky with very little air and light pollution. Astronomers say it will allow them to reach back 13 billion years to answer fundamental questions about the advent of the universe.

The Thirty Meter Telescope project got approval to move forward last month. While it was the final legal step, opponents vowed to keep fighting and even get arrested if necessary to stop construction.

Gov. David Ige said unarmed National Guard units will be used to transport personnel and supplies and enforce some road closures, but they will not be used in a law enforcement capacity during planned protests.

"We just are asking people to be safe ... we certainly would ask that they be respectful of those who have to work on this project," Ige said. "We certainly are being respectful of those who choose to voice their disagreement with the project—we understand that that's important as well."



This undated file illustration provided by Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT) shows the proposed giant telescope on Mauna Kea on Hawaii's Big Island. Construction on giant telescope to start again in the third week of July 2019, after court battles over Hawaii site that some consider sacred. (TMT via AP, File)

Four protesters held signs in the reception area of the governor's office after officials announced construction plans. Protests at the mountain will be peaceful, Healani Sonoda-Pale said.

Rhonda Vincent said closing the road to the mountain is like blocking access to a church.

"If we can't access our own gods, our own spirituality, isn't that wrong?" she said.

The American Civil Liberties Union of Hawaii sent a letter to Ige and other [state officials](#) expressing concern that the state recently purchased a long-range acoustic device known as a "sound gun" or "sound cannon." The letter demanded that the state not use it for any anti-protest efforts or crowd control during [telescope](#) protests.



From right, Hawaii Gov. David Ige, Henry Yang, chair of the Thirty Meter Telescope International Observatory Board of Governors, Ed Sniffen, deputy director of the Department of Transportation, Suzanne Case, chair of the Board of Land and Natural Resources, and Hawaii Attorney General Clare Connors take questions during a news conference about the construction of a giant telescope, Wednesday, July 10, 2019 in Honolulu. Construction of the telescope will start again next week after lengthy court battles and passionate protests from

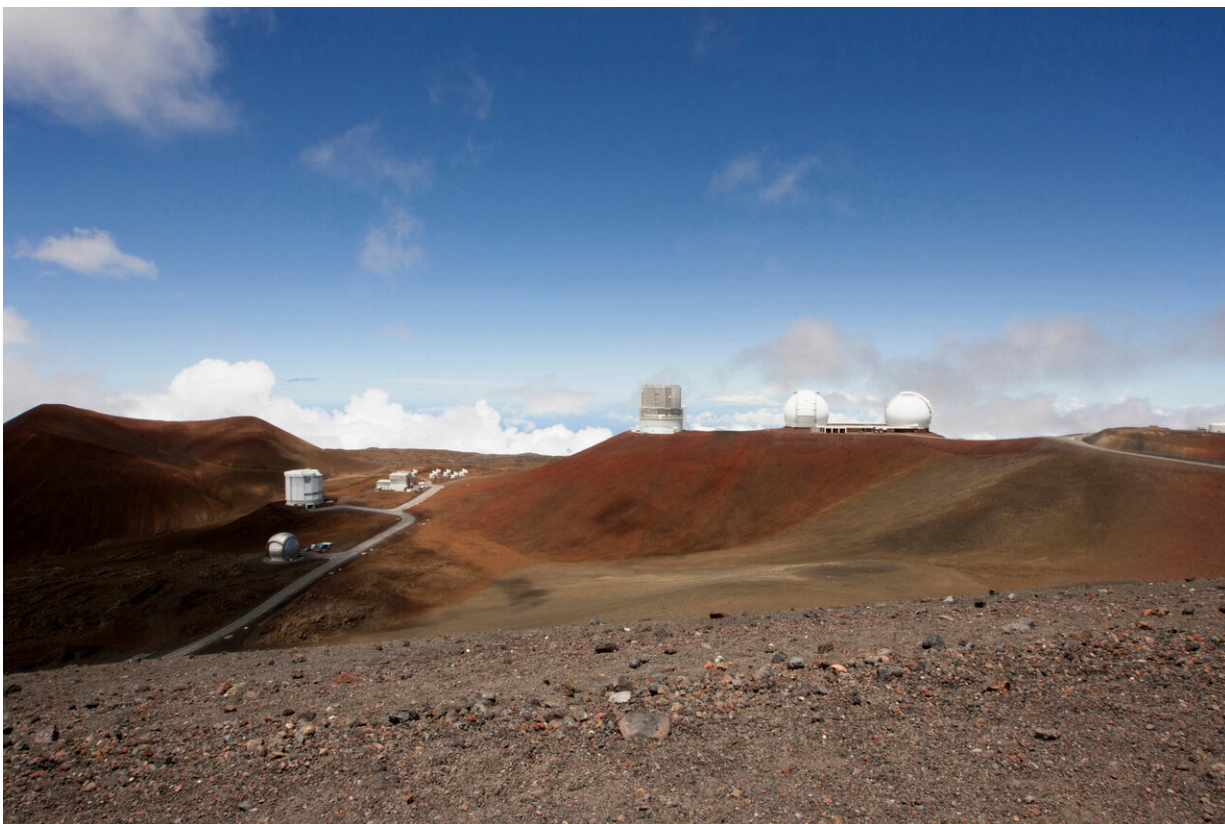
those who say building it on Hawaii's tallest mountain will desecrate land sacred to some Native Hawaiians. (AP Photo/Jennifer Sinco Kelleher)

Hawaii Attorney General Clare Connors said the device isn't intended for any forceful use and will be used to communicate with large groups of people.

Opponents say the \$1.4 billion telescope will desecrate sacred land. Supporters say the cutting-edge instrument will bring educational and economic opportunities to Hawaii.

"We aim to build the TMT for the benefit of all mankind and to understand the universe in which we all live," said Henry Yang, chairman of the Thirty Meter Telescope International Observatory board of governors.

A group of universities in California and Canada make up the telescope company, with partners from China, India and Japan. The instrument's primary mirror would measure 98 feet (30 meters) in diameter. Compared with the largest existing visible-light telescope in the world, it would be three times as wide, with nine times more area.



In this Aug. 31, 2015, file photo, observatories and telescopes sit atop Mauna Kea, Hawaii's tallest mountain and the proposed construction site for a new \$1.4 billion telescope, near Hilo, Hawaii. Construction on a giant telescope will start again next week after lengthy court battles and passionate protests from those who say building it on Hawaii's tallest mountain will desecrate land sacred to some Native Hawaiians. State officials announced Wednesday, July 10, 2019, that the road to the top of Mauna Kea mountain on the Big Island will be closed Monday as equipment is delivered to the construction site. (AP Photo/Caleb Jones, File)

Plans for the project date to 2009, when scientists selected Mauna Kea after a five-year, around-the-world campaign to find the ideal site.

It won a series of approvals from Hawaii, including a permit to build on

conservation land in 2011.

Protests disrupted a groundbreaking and Hawaiian blessing ceremony at the site in 2014. After that, the demonstrations intensified.

Construction stopped in April 2015 after protesters were arrested for blocking the work. A second attempt to restart construction a few months later ended with more arrests and crews pulling back.



Hawaii Gov. David Ige speaks during a news conference about the construction of a new Big Island telescope, Wednesday, July 10, 2019 in Honolulu. Construction of the telescope will start again next week after lengthy court battles and passionate protests from those who say building it on Hawaii's tallest mountain will desecrate land sacred to some Native Hawaiians. (AP Photo/Jennifer Sinco Kelleher)

The state Supreme Court upheld the project's construction permit last year.

Because the telescope is such a divisive issue in Hawaii, some say they're afraid to publicly support the project because they fear blowback from activists.

the divided opinions have been challenging, said David Lassner, president of the University of Hawaii, which is subleasing land near Mauna Kea's summit to the telescope project.

"There are also many, many people who see the benefits of the project, including many kanaka maoli," he said, referring to Native Hawaiians. "Many of whom choose not to speak out in support but many of whom do want to see this project built for the contributions to human knowledge, for the contributions to education, for the contributions to the economy and the sheer impact of discovery."





Protesters talk to reporters outside a news conference about the construction of a new Big Island telescope, Wednesday, July 10, 2019, in Honolulu. Construction of the telescope will start again next week after lengthy court battles and passionate protests from those who say building it on Hawaii's tallest mountain will desecrate land sacred to some Native Hawaiians. (AP Photo/Jennifer Sinco Kelleher)

It's not yet clear what protesters plan to do. Kahookahi Kanuha, who has been arrested three times while protesting the project, said he's not sure yet if he'll go to Mauna Kea next week, but he hopes that a lot people do show up.

"We all know this is a contentious issue. We all know people on all sides of it," he said, adding that he wants supporters and opponents to remain

committed to non-violence.

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