

PSLU Committee

From: Lee Altenberg <Lee.Altenberg@dynamics.org>
Sent: Wednesday, September 09, 2020 1:43 AM
To: PSLU Committee
Cc: Lee Altenberg; Rowena Dagdag-Andaya; Michele.McLean@co.maui.hi.us
Subject: Testimony on PSLU-65
Attachments: Altenberg_Testimony_2020-9-9.rtf

Dear Planning and Sustainable Land Use Committee Members,

Please find attached my testimony for the agenda item on Honua`ula.

Mahalo,
Lee

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September 9, 2020

From: Dr. Lee Altenberg
To: Planning and Sustainable Land Use Committee
Re: PSLU-65 Honua`ula/Wailea 670 Compliance Review

Dear Members of the Planning and Sustainable Land Use Committee,

As the Committee meets in the midst of this pandemic, we are all learning the hard way that biology has a reality that can suddenly overthrow our neat little boxes of commerce, development, and economics. A little virus from a remote cave in China has changed everyone's reality across the globe.

The Endangered Species Act was passed when people came to terms with the biological reality that private economic activity was exterminating many life forms, robbing all future generations of the ecosystems that are under our dominion and the heritage of humanity.

Condition 27 in the 2008 rezoning ordinance for Wailea 670, now called Honua`ula, was meant to preserve for posterity one of the last large remnants of wiliwili ecosystem left in the Hawai`i. It therefore greatly disturbs me to learn that the latest biological survey by Honua`ula Partners LLC (HP) concludes that the listed endangered species recorded to inhabit the property have been locally extirpated. Listed endangered species previously living on the property include the `awikiwi vine, *Canavalia pubescens*, used to make the traditional "maunaloa" leis, and the *Manduca blackburni* caterpillar and hawk moth. Hawaiian yellow-faced bees, *Hylaeus*, which are candidates for endangered species listing, have also been recorded on the property.

If true, this represents a failure of private and public institutions to pass on Hawaii's biological riches to future generations. The extirpation of these endangered species from Honua`ula would merit coverage in the local Maui press, and concern conservationists worldwide.

However, I think it is unlikely that the species are truly extirpated from Honua`ula. In particular, there are seed banks of `awikiwiki scattered throughout the southern `a`a lava. The seeds have evolved to avoid germination during droughts, as is currently the condition. A survey of Yellowstone Park in the winter would conclude that there were no endangered Grizzly bears present – because they would be hibernating. The dry-forest adapted `awikiwiki effectively hibernates during droughts by not wasting its seeds to germinate under hostile conditions.

Nevertheless, the report of the local extirpation of endangered species in Honua`ula should raise alarm. The Committee needs to hold a meeting in which the many citizens who have taken an interest in preserving the biological and cultural heritage at Honua`ula can present their own findings to the Committee.

While I am sure it was never the intent of Mr. Jencks to be in charge of remnants of an

endangered ecosystem, that is the biological reality, and circumstance has put it under his kuleana.

It is my 2007 report on the remnant wiliwili forest of Honua`ula that is explicitly mentioned in rezoning Condition 27. I moved to Maui in 1994 to care for my ailing father. I am a theoretical biologist researching evolution. While I worked on my biological equations, I realized that the precious products of evolution were going extinct around me in Hawai`i – I was fiddling while Rome burned – and I felt it was a professional obligation to lend my expertise toward preserving the biological treasures of Hawai`i.

It was 18 years ago that I originally met Mr. Charlie Jencks when I asked him permission to survey the native wiliwili forest at Wailea 670. I came back and reported to him that he had a major surviving piece of native dry forest on his property, a fact which previous surveys had not conveyed. The botanists that came with me compared it to Pu`u O Kali just 3 miles away, which is the finest remnant of wiliwili habitat left in the world. I recommended to Mr. Jencks that he place this area in a conservation easement and preserve it for all posterity.

The history of what happened after that is full of contention. It is the kuleana of the Planning and Sustainable Land Use Committee to represent the interests of the public and posterity in preserving the remnants of creation that are present in Honua`ula. That is the purpose of Condition 27. Do not let that purpose be undone. Please hold further meetings with citizen presentations to investigate the state of conservation in the lowland dry forest remnants in Honua`ula.

Mahalo for your attention,

Dr. Lee Altenberg (writing as an individual, not as a representative of the University of Hawai`i)

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