

The Galloping News from the Mountaintop – November 2004

For Friends of the Forest & the Koke'e Leaseholders Association

PARKS WILL PRESENT THE DRAFT MASTER PLAN on Thursday, November 18

State Parks and its consultant, R. M. Towill Corp., will present their Draft Master Plan for the Koke'e and Waimea Canyon State Parks at a public information meeting beginning at 5 pm at Elelele School. The term "public information meeting" means only that the plan will be presented – it does not mean that you can address the meeting, except one on one with either State Parks staff or the consultant.

Therefore we strongly encourage that you submit written testimony, as the Board of Land & Natural Resources will very likely decide the future of Koke'e next year.

Although many good ideas are presented in almost one thousand pages, the Plan as it relates to the cabins appears seriously flawed. Why?

It recommends taking the 30 cabins nearest the Lodge and converting them to short term rentals, projecting 90 per cent occupancy year round with kamaaina rates of \$90 a night, discounted from a "rack rate" of \$120 a night. Such occupancy appears remarkably optimistic. Kauai only managed 70% for 2001 and 2002 ... and the demand for more rental cabins is never quantified: how many are needed? 2? 6? 20? 30?

The remaining cabins will be renovated, and then auctioned off for leases varying from 5 to 20 years with upset prices from **\$4,195 (cabins in poor condition) to \$10,114 (cabins in good condition) a year.** Cabins in good condition will receive 5-year leases to "Maximize the number of Hawaii

residents using the cabins" and then auctioned again 5 years later. Leases would be "staggered to make some cabins available for lease each year." This seems to be code for "maximizing profits by restricting supply." Cabins in poor condition get 20-year leases "to provide sufficient use to justify the costly renovation or replacement. [Source: Appendix H, Evaluation of Management Options for Cabins – available together with excerpts from the Plan at <http://www.malamaokokee.org>]

In addition to the lease rent, "Lessees would be charged a fair share of the cost of providing support services (e.g., water service, road maintenance, etc.). [Appendix H, page 2]. This is estimated at **"approximately \$100 per month."** However, what is that "fair share"? Based on our observations, the lessees' portion of the water and roads can only be a small proportion of total use.

The plan ignores the fact that our current lease rents essentially offset the entire cost of operating and maintaining the Parks and have done so since at least 1985 (except for costs directly attributable to the Lodge or other users). It also ignores the substantial contributions of the leaseholders and the Museum, suggesting instead that Parks "Work with Hui o Laka, Koke'e Leaseholders Association and other groups to develop volunteer programs for park maintenance and renovation projects." [Plan page 7-34.] Actually that's exactly what we've been doing since 1918!

Over the last several years alone, leaseholders and friends have renovated the major public facilities within the Parks and have donated over \$100,000 in cash and labor for these substantial renovation projects, which include new roofs at the Koke'e and Pu'u Ka Pele pavilions, the Koke'e Park Headquarters, and the restrooms at Pu'u Hinahina.

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The Plan envisions substantially more development, including new lookouts and improvements to existing lookouts and trails. It would pay for this development by substantially increased lease rents and a gate to collect entrance fees, relocating the historic Park Headquarters to serve as a “park entry gate support building.”

State Parks will need 29 new positions “to carry out the Master Plan recommendations.” However, Parks lost 21 authorized permanent positions this fiscal year, leaving only 90 permanent positions throughout the islands. [*Environment Hawaii, November 2004, page 8*]

The Plan does not recognize that there have always been natural changes in the leaseholds, and that the rate of change is similar to any other well-established community. Our research show that 51 of 111 cabins offered in the 1985 auctions changed over, and that there has been at least 75 changes since then – with some cabins changing owners several times.

One good point: The plan suggests adopting architectural guidelines, in a “Koke’e Vernacular style” for all new buildings, including the 510 sf partially pre-assembled “cabin kits” shipped from California to replace existing cabins in poor condition. However the new “cabin kits” would be double wall, on foundations (*concrete? It’s not clear*). **Yes, it’s true!** [*Appendix H, page 9*].

What is your Association doing? We’re working with the members of the **Board of Land & Natural Resources to help them make more intelligent decisions for the future of Koke’e.** The plan, as it is now written, would appear to turn Koke’e into a gated community for, as one leaseholder put it, the “idle rich,” and would price most Hawaii families out of the market for leaseholds. Is that its intent?

A few leaseholders might be able to afford lease rents of \$10,000 a year or more, but it is likely that most would not – and as a result, any local connection with the Parks would be lost. The long established relationship between the community and the Parks would be only a memory. Why would the agency (DLNR) charged with historic preservation preside over the destruction of this historic community? **Should leases be affordable for Kauai families?**

Tell Parks what you think ... by email to Lauren.A.Tanaka@hawaii.gov or by mail to Lauren at Division of State Parks, PO Box 621, Honolulu, Oahu, Hawaii 96809 [Please remember that Lauren did *NOT* write the plan].

Please cc: Ellie.Snyder@Rare-Dear.com , or PO Box 1113, Lawai, Kauai, Hawaii 96765. We’ll make sure Kauai’s new Land Board member, Ron Agor, gets a copy of all our testimony.

Read the plan on line, or at the Hanapepe, Lihue, Princeville, or Waimea Libraries or the Waimea Tech Center.

Leaseholders in the News

Ua hala na kupuna Gloria McElgunn Duarte died in late September when her car went over the cliff above Waimea ... Her beloved dog Baron survived the fall.

What’s happening on the mountain?

January 15, Saturday – Our Annual Meeting. Dinner at The Lodge at Koke’e. More in the next Galloping News.

March? Our next community workday.

We’ll help the YWCA meet the new EPA requirements for large capacity septic systems.

For further information, please contact Frank O. Hay 639.7704 or fhay@aloha.net

Written and edited by Frank O. Hay. Any errors or omissions are mine.