

The Garden Island – Letters to the Editor, Saturday, June 3, 2006

The truth about Koke'e

The recent Garden Island article "Koke'e cabin owners fighting back" reported that many Koke'e leaseholders have applied for permits to remove or demolish their cabins. For many of us, this is a last-ditch effort to save a historic cultural landscape from certain destruction.

A few of the cabins in Koke'e have been handed down over several generations; many others, including my own, were purchased; a few were built more recently on vacant lots. The current cabin owners each feel a close, personal connection to their cabin, which have required not only considerable financial investment but also time, energy, passion and commitment.

When the current leases expire, the State plans to take all of our cabins, saying that the leases contain a 'surrender' clause. Not only is this action illegal, it's simply wrong. I bought my cabin; I have title to it. I fixed it up, from a 'tear-down' to a comfy little cabin. If the State wants to assume ownership of my cabin, they should at least pay me a fair price for it. If you were in my position, wouldn't you feel the same?

That is why we have applied for these permits — to prevent the State from taking our private property without paying for it. At the State's proposed auction, if I am not the high bidder, sadly, I must be prepared to remove my cabin, unless I receive a fair price for it.

Longtime Kaua'i residents still remember with anger the 1985 auction — the first ever for Koke'e leases. What happened then was wrong, and horribly divisive; more than 50 families lost their beloved cabins, and at least 15 cabins were demolished or removed. One burned down.

This wonderful, unique historic mountain community is on the verge of being destroyed forever by poor, short-sighted planning decisions. Is that what our State leadership wants as its legacy? Those who do not learn from history are bound to repeat it.

There are always cabins available in Koke'e. There have been over 80 changes in ownership since 1985 – that's an average of one every 3 months. There are also dozens of identified buildable vacant lots as well as many already-state-owned cabins. Therefore, the current leases should be re-negotiated, the cabins should remain in private ownership, and the auction reserved for all the vacant properties. Increase access and opportunity, be fair to the current cabin owners, and let the free market operate.

Taking private property and selling Koke'e off to the highest bidder must be stopped. The solution should be one of vision and partnership, working with and for the people of Kaua'i, to assure that current local families, and generations to come, can enjoy Koke'e, as their grandparents did.

The people of Kaua'i need to take a stand. If you agree, please contact your local legislator, or better yet e-mail the DLNR Chairman directly: PeterYoung@hawaii.gov. And tell a friend.

• Erik Coopersmith,
Koke'e leaseholder and cabin owner, Lot 29

Undersigned by Mike and Joann Givens, Koke'e leaseholders and cabin owners, Lot No. 10; Peter Beckerman, Koke'e leaseholder and cabin owners, Lot No. 30; Paullie Purdy, Kaua'i resident; Allen Rundbaken, Kaua'i resident; Dr. Harold and Alice Furst, California residents and frequent visitors to Kaua'i; David and Lolita Halper, California residents and visitors to Kaua'i; Paul and Karen Honeywell, Lake Tahoe, California residents and visitors to Kaua'i

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