
Hawaii: Are eucalyptus the only possible crop in Hamakua?

Friends of Hamakua is gravely concerned over a proposed plywood/veneer plant and about the State Forest Hamakua Management Plan, which would imply the harvesting of 4,000 acres of old "non-native" plantations. There are several reasons for this concern. Access roads will have to be built into all of these, many forested areas. Once harvesting begins, all public access to these roads will be closed off due to liability concerns. Once the roads are in place, access will be gained to the few remaining native tree stands, which the plan says, may be removed if necessary.

Government officials reported at a public meeting held in Laupahoehoe --which was well represented by nearly 100 residents who were very opposed to this plan-- that the old eucalyptus plantations are worth \$6 million. However, it has been proven in several states that the cost of planning, building infrastructure, harvest liabilities, and loss of old growth far exceeds the potential income. Much of the costs of this incoming industry will be born by the taxpayer, like fire prevention, property tax reductions, infrastructure, and possible future subsidies. Why does the State think Hawaii can experience a profit, when this industry survives elsewhere only through subsidies?

Current plans involve the plantation of 105,000 acres, mostly composed of eucalyptus (85,000 acres) and only 20,000 acres of native hardwoods. To this, Friends of Hamakua replies: "Are we sick already of the 16,000 acres already planted! Do we really want to dedicate so much more land to this crop? It cannot be true that only eucalyptus trees are the solution to the non-irrigated sugarlands. It rains, and there should be many crops and higher value trees that will benefit the land and the people. Many of us remember Capitol Wood Chips and what that was like. Imagine 10 times that amount of logging and chipping along the Hamakua."

Friends of Hamakua say that they would embrace a forest industry that promotes long term goals of higher value hardwoods that would be managed selectively, incorporating sustainable practices so that their children may prosper, but not the short term 4-7 year rotation that Prutimber plans. They would support a forest industry that doesn't spray inordinate amounts of herbicides around its neighbours, who treats local contractors fairly, whose words they can believe in, and who immediately invests in on-site fire fighting infrastructure. They say that they would also be open to a State Forest Plan that takes each parcel of forest individually, without the threat of a huge mill that wants to greedily harvest all the trees.

Taking into account that the Hamakua State Forestry Management Plan's objective is to supply the proposed plywood/veneer plant with trees, Friends of Hamakua are demanding an environmental impact study (EIS) to be conducted on the entire monocrop eucalyptus, and on the plywood/veneer timber industry before more land is dedicated either to planting or to harvesting. They have requested that the County Council conduct such a study, but its Chairman responded with only replies from the forest industry and affiliated parties. In view of that, they are beginning to circulate a petition that demands an EIS be conducted before going a step further. "How can we support", they ask, "an industry that will dedicate so much of our land, change our way of life, and effect our property values and businesses?"

