Hawaii: Resisting pulpwood plantations

Pulpwood plantations being proposed for the Big Island (Hawaii) are a long way from being real forests, full of a variety of different kinds of mixed ages trees, rich with vegetation and wildlife. Tourists who come to Hawaii for its natural tropical beauty will see instead industrial enclaves of mile after mile of one type of tree, planted in straight, easily harvested rows, kept clear of undergrowth. Fast growing eucalyptus are repeatedly aerial sprayed with poisons, and clear-cut every five to seven years, with the field debris burned. Left behind is barren land susceptible to soil erosion and runoff.

Pulptree plantations have noting to do with sustainable forestry, despite a recent propaganda smokescreen by State officials. The leasing of thousands of acres to Oji Paper Co. -Japan's largest paper supplier- will neither improve the environment nor create many jobs. Wherever these industrial plantations have been established they have created major environmental, health, economic, and social problems. The pulptree deal with Oji Paper Co. primarily benefit large multinational corporations and a few locally-connected businessmen and politicians. Hamakua Timber's parent organization is Prudential Insurance Co., which has already successfully developed ex-sugar cane land for commercial purposes on the region. Giant Oji Paper Co. is part of the Mitsui Keiretus industrial group, with strong business connections to the Dai-Ichi and Mitsubishi trading companies.

It is feared that the thousands of acres of monocrops proposed for Hamakua and Kohala will significantly damage existing ecological systems. A grove of eucalyptus trees growing near Kalopa Park on Hawaii Island can be a token of what vast areas in the future are to become: a barren soil with no undergrowth.

On already depleted soils such as those of old sugar cane lands of Hamakua and Kohala, the number of crop rotations before the soil is completely exhausted can be as few as two or three cycles. This brings up the possibility that these lands will be used for only 7 to 20 years and then abandoned for agricultural purposes, because the soil's fertility is exhausted and uneconomical to farm. What then? After the harvesting the landscape will have an unappealing clear-cut look. What about the efforts to promote eco-tourism on Big Island?

Local communities already know how the companies work. Over 1,500 signatures were collected by Friends of Hamakua (FOH) last March and April, pleading with Prudential Insurance - Hamakua Timber to stop their spraying and burning. Hamakua residents gravely worry that Oji Paper Co. will dump even more dangerous toxic insecticides, fungicides, and pesticides into their community if granted leases to more nearby State and county lands. Their fears are confirmed by independent studies.

Source: Pulptree Plantations Are Not Sustainable Forests: Facts About Eucalyptus Estates That Mayor Yamashiro and DLNR Officials Don't Tell You". Ira Rohter Department of Political Science. University of Hawaii - Manoa. 13/10/97.