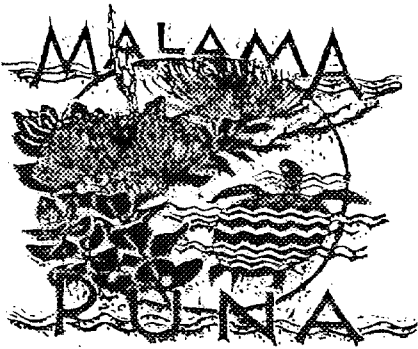




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Preserving Hawai 'i's precious natural heritage

September 24, 2002

Chair & Councilpersons
Hawaii County Council

RE: BILL 256

Six years ago Puna Outdoor Circle began the lengthy process to have the grove of mangos added to the Exceptional Tree Ordinance. Now we are Malama O Puna, and it was my pleasure as president to submit the nomination to the Mayor's Arborist Advisory Committee which you now have before you. All the trees nominated are within the County right-of-way. There are others on abutting private property, and eventually we hope to educate and enlist those landowners to nominate their trees as well.

You are all aware that the Ala Kahakai is now protected federally as a historic trail. It is *almost* circum-island – the exception being Puna. Puna lost sizeable segments of the old "King's Trail" to volcanic action. Yet there still remain sections that are in excellent condition and are historically important. One of these is now known as Government Beach Road. This narrow dirt road is lined on both sides with ancient rock walls and old growth mango trees. It is one of the few remaining legacies of "Old Hawaii".

According to local historian Kepa Maly, the oldest trees in this grove were planted over 100 years ago for shade and sustenance. They have done their job well. Certified Arborist Michael Kraus, who sits on the Mayor's Arborist Advisory Committee, says that a healthy mango can live up to 300 years and beyond, so saving them definitely constitutes long range planning. The largest tree in the grove has a circumference of 18 feet! Many of the other older trees have a 12 foot circumference. The Wa'a Wa'a community is working on a project whereby this part of the King's Highway will be added to the National Register of Historic Places. It meets the criteria.

Besides being exceptional by virtue of size and historical status, the grove is beautiful and magical. As you come out of the radiating heat of the Kapoho lava flows, you are suddenly immersed in a refreshing cathedral-like archway of cool shade. Golden sunlight filters down through the leaves, creating dappled patterns on the road. The air is fragrant and filled with birdsong. You don't need a sign to inform you that this is a very

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special place – that’s obvious to anyone with a modicum of sensitivity. Park your car and stroll for a while. Heal your psyche. If Hawaii is a healing island, as the promotions confirm, this historic road with its mango grove is important therapy.

Now that Hawaii Island Economic Development (HIEDC) is working to create a Heritage Corridor for lower Puna, saving historic and beautiful areas like this gains an additional economic importance. And as you all know, Puna needs all the economic help it can get. Protecting these trees by adding them to the Exceptional Tree Ordinance will help our local economy in a way that all of us can support – we don’t have to sacrifice the environment for the sake of needed jobs. Enjoyment of this lovely and historic drive will draw tourists to our area, while our residents can continue to enjoy it and collect the bounty for “ono” pickled mango. Please pass Bill 256. Mahalo.

Kend Siracusa