



This view of the 20,000-acre Ka'a ahupua'a shows the area which is designated for a wind farm but is also cited as culturally important in the history of Lanai. It also is a hunting area.
Robin Kaye photo

Proposed wind farm site named 'endangered historic' area

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LANAI CITY - The site of a massive proposed wind farm in West Lanai where hundreds of archaeological and cultural sites have been identified has been named one of the state's "most endangered historic places" for 2011 by the Historic Hawaii Foundation.

Advocates for historic preservation said the 20,000-acre Ka'a ahupua'a is significant in Native Hawaiian cultural practices, stories and history. Community members were concerned that Castle & Cooke's proposal to develop a 170-turbine wind farm in the area could disrupt the "cultural landscape" and change the experience of being in the area, said Historic Hawaii Foundation Executive Director Kiersten Faulkner.

She said her organization hoped to see a resolution to the conflict that would meet the need for renewable energy while respecting a place that was important to Hawaiian culture and history.

"By having this on the most endangered list, I think it helps spur that conversation," she said.

Officials with Castle & Cooke Resorts did not respond to a request for comment.

Lanai Culture and Heritage Center Executive Director Kepa Maly said Ka'a was "storied."

"It is host to an unknown number of traditional cultural sites," he said.

The heritage center recently conducted a cultural survey of the area, including archival research, oral histories and a "reconnaissance level" archaeological survey.

In ancient times, Ka'a had several coastal settlements, the largest heiau on the island and an extensive agricultural system in upland areas. It also was noted for its fisheries, including an ancient turtle fishery. There also are numerous stories about the area's mythological significance, including accounts of interactions between deities and human beings.

More recently, ranching and introduced goats, deer and sheep have left the area eroded and windswept.

Maly said he was thrilled the area had been recognized by Historic Hawaii Foundation.

"I think the lands of Lanai, like Ka'a, are worthy of being acknowledged for their history and their fragile nature," he said. "For us, the challenge is to be good stewards, and recognize that change occurs - but do we erase everything in order for that change to take place?"

Robin Kaye of Friends of Lanai, which opposes the "Big Wind" project, was also pleased to see the area's significance acknowledged.

"It's a great recognition of what has previously been called by (Hawaiian Electric Co.) and Castle & Cooke a, quote, 'barren, arid wasteland,'" he said.

In addition to its numerous archaeological and cultural sites, the land is also an important hunting area for the island, he noted.

"It calls attention to the fact that this is a land with meaning and history," he said. "It's not just a place for (Castle & Cooke owner David) Murdock to make a lot of money."

Faulkner said her organization's annual list was meant to be a "call to action," drawing attention to places of historical and cultural significance, and letting the public know they may be at risk.

"We really can't take it for granted that they'll always be there just because they've always been there," she said.

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