

Jennifer Malin

Preserving Hawai'i's Traditional Landscapes

As the final melodies of the chanter's *oli* echoed through the auditorium, the 1995 conference, "Preserving Hawai'i's Traditional Landscapes," officially got underway. The National Park Service-funded training conference on landscape preservation and identification was held on September 15–17, 1995, at East-West Center near the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa outside of Honolulu, and at a field site on the `Ewa plain of west O`ahu.

Traditional landscapes can take divergent forms, and the island landscapes of Hawai'i are both unique and threatened ones. Native Hawaiian cultural and sacred sites, agricultural terraces and intricate pond-fields, windblown fields of sugarcane and pineapple, and rolling hills of pasture lands cultivated for cattle grazing all demarcate different stages in the history of Hawai'i. With the decline of agricultural industries and the increasing demand for housing and commercial development, the traditional landscapes and rural character of Hawai'i are being changed forever. This transition also means that some of the islands' most scenic areas and historic legacy will be lost. The conference was an examination of these invaluable resources and a discussion of ways that they may be preserved for the future.

Ua mau ke ea o ka `aina i ka pono. "The life of the land is preserved in righteousness." The state motto of Hawai'i was repeated many times throughout the course of this significant and often emotional conference, as the diverse participants grappled to identify what exactly it is that defines the traditional Hawaiian landscape and what measures need to be taken in order to preserve it. Over 180 participants registered for the first two days of lectures and workshops; 65 attended the on-site workshop on agricultural housing rehabilitation at the site of the former `Ewa sugar plantation. Participants included planners, architects, academics, students, members of community advocacy organizations, landscape architects, and other interested members of the public. There was a substantial representation of Native Hawaiian participants in attendance, as presenters and moderators, representatives of Native Hawaiian organizations, as well as individual community members. The islands of Kaua'i, Maui, Lana'i, Moloka'i, and O`ahu were all represented, and conference attendees came from as far away as the Republic of Palau, New Zealand, New York, and Washington, DC.

Topics covered during the conference included Preserving Landscapes: The Challenge for Hawai'i; The Native Hawaiian Landscape; Protection of Open Space; Cultural and Archaeological Landscapes; and Landscapes Under Threat. Several of the sessions focused on the problems facing Hawai'i and the sudden threats to cultural and

historic landscapes. Other sessions identified the range of historic and cultural landscapes in the state and introduced participants to ways of recognizing those landscapes through the National Register program. Participants were introduced to methods employed elsewhere in the United States to protect special areas through citizen-based programs. They also discussed innovative land-use programs and other means of protection. Workshops were offered to introduce participants to differing means of landscape recognition and protection.

Plenary sessions featured Samuel Stokes of the Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance branch of NPS speaking on "Preserving Landscapes: The National Perspective"; Charles Birnbaum, ASLA, Coordinator of the NPS Historic Landscapes Initiative on "Treatment of Cultural Landscapes"; and Elizabeth Watson of the National Coalition for Heritage Areas on "Heritage Areas." William Murtagh, former Keeper of the National Register and a previous director of the University of Hawai'i Historic Preservation Program, served as a moderator for plenary sessions and led the Panel Discussion on "Protection of Open Space."

The third day of the conference featured a field trip to the leeward part of the island of O`ahu, to the village of `Ewa, now undergoing a city and county-funded rehabilitation program after the closing of the `Ewa sugar plantation (`Ewa Villages Revitalization Project will be covered in a future issue of *CRM*). Participants were introduced to the project site—one of the few remaining residential sugar communities on O`ahu. The trip was an opportunity for conference-goers to experience at close range one of the many threatened landscapes under discussion and view varying stages of its rehabilitation.

The issue of open space versus development was perhaps the most significant and heated topic discussed during the entirety of the conference. It was recognized by all in attendance that there is need for more coalition between the community and its concerns with the developers and government officials that affect the future direction for the land-use and development of Hawai'i. Appropriate land-uses to replace the previous plantation economy are needed, with due concern to how the outcome will affect not only the tourism industry and the state economy, but the kind of communities that local people are going to live in. A strong undercurrent of concern for Native Hawaiians and traditional cultural landscapes ran continuously throughout the program. Priority needs to remain focused on ways of protecting areas with a high level of cultural and religious significance, and promoting a return to traditional values of land stewardship, *Malama `aina*, and a collective vision in values concerning growth and development in a state with such a small land mass. *He ali'i ka `aina; he kauwa ke kanaka.* "The land is a chief, man is its servant."

Jennifer Malin is a graduate student in the University of Hawai'i's Historic Preservation Program and a co-coordinator of the "Preserving Hawai'i's Traditional Landscapes" Conference.