

# 'green' tactics used by the environmental establishment are a total waste of time - Special report: the environment

[Insight on the News, Feb 18, 2003](#) by [Eric P. Olsen](#)

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Nowhere does the logic of federal environmental policy seem more mismatched to endangered-species preservation than on Hawaii, an ecological anomaly 2,500 miles from the U.S. mainland. About as near to Washington as Albania--actually Albania is closer--the Hawaiian archipelago is the most remote and isolated ecosystem on Earth and a virtual command center of endangered species. Of 743 officially designated endangered plants in the United States, Hawaii has more than one-third of them. And nowhere is there a greater threat to the survival of these species than the aggressive land-lockdown tactics of the national environmental-preservation organizations, their lawyers and their fund-raisers.

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But these environmental activists and regulators never have met anyone quite like Keith Robinson, the fifth-generation descendent of the legendary Sinclair family who arrived in Hawaii from New Zealand in the 1860s. Keith and his brother, Bruce, are joint owners of the seventh-largest Hawaiian island, Niihau, known throughout the state as kupu, or forbidden. Purchased for \$10,000 in gold in 1872, the 72-square-mile island has been preserved from outside contact for 130 years. Niihau islanders trace their ancestry to before contact by Capt. James Cook in 1778. School and church services are held in native Hawaiian, and travel to the Forbidden Island is by personal invitation of the Robinsons only.



The Robinsons' astonishing preservation of Hawaiian language and traditions on Niihau is mirrored by Keith Robinson's commitment to endangered indigenous plants. The family also holds some 50,000 acres on Kauai--breathtaking jungle-clad mountains, towering waterfalls and tropical forest that look like critical habitat for the likes of King Kong. (Indeed, Jurassic Park was filmed on Robinson lands, and the helicopter used in the opening scenes was Robinson's Niihau shuttle.)

In his trademark green hard hat and rusted-out Nissan pickup, Robinson is the plain-speaking, hands-on manager of his Kauai Wildlife Reserve, a self-described "outlaw operation" that for nearly 20 years has preserved some of the most endangered species on Earth. A typical day for Robinson can involve a backbreaking 18-hour trek into remote canyons to retrieve or care for a rare species, a grueling and single-minded enterprise for the 60-year-old.

I give Keith tremendous credit, says John Fay, a biologist with the endangered-species program for the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) in Washington. "He has done something truly remarkable with minimal resources. I visited his reserve probably 10 years ago, and I remember going over my notes later and realizing he was personally the guarantor of probably a dozen species of endangered plants."

Robinson's assessment of his successes is characteristically blunt: "My private, one-man Hawaiian endangered-species reserve is based on hard work, independent thought and old-fashioned moral standards. This combination worked just fine for America's Founding Fathers, and it still works well on the rare occasions when it is tried today."

Through the years Robinson has donated cuttings and seeds to state and private environmental organizations, but he has little patience for them today. "During the last 30 years," he says, "Hawaii's environmental establishment has become totally corrupt, motivated primarily by a lust for money and power. Now they have found that they can use the U.S. Endangered Species Act to seize zoning control of huge tracts of land, on the pretext that these areas are 'critical habitat' for endangered species."

Earlier this year critical-habitat designations were proposed for more than 60,000 acres on Kauai as a result of a 1997 lawsuit brought by Earthjustice --an environmental law firm formerly known as the Sierra Club Defense Fund --against the FWS. And according to Hawaii state forester Michael Buck, these designations "are just the beginning of a process that will systematically designate similar lands throughout the state that could encompass up to 500,000 acres--or one-eighth of the land area of the entire state of Hawaii."

Robinson claims these designations are based on a systematic deception of the public. "Environmental extremists are wasting large sums of public money in expensive and completely useless habitat listings," he says. "The real truth is that Hawaii's endangered plants are biologically incompetent. This is the final, immutable, all-encompassing, result-determining reality of all propagation work with these species. They evolved for millions of years in benign isolation, where there were no significant threats or competition. Thus they lost their biological efficiency and were rapidly overwhelmed when thousands of efficient and aggressive species were introduced that evolved in the savage competition of continental ecosystems."

He continues, "They will relentlessly continue to decline to extinction in the wild, no matter how much alleged 'critical habitat' is designated by lines drawn on maps. Meanwhile, the environmental establishment has created a weird mixture of quackery, propaganda, supposition and wishful thinking, and have been so misled by it that they are almost totally unable to grow healthy populations of Hawaii's rarest plants. The only way they can be saved is by growing them in intensively managed and cultivated reserves, where they can be constantly protected."

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