

On My Mind  
6/30/06

Last week I wrote that it would appear that Managaha is eroding away and no one seems to be doing anything about it, to be in charge. But I was wrong. Someone IS doing something. A committee has been formed, and a plan of action developed, with participation by all the right parties, including Tasi Tours, DFW, CRMO, DPL, and NOAA. At present, the group is putting together a memorandum of understanding with the University of Hawaii for the conduct of a "Managaha Island Shoreline Stability Assessment" that will include both an impact assessment, and a discussion of alternatives.

According to the minutes of the group's recent meeting, "the latter [the assessment] will provide the best solutions to the erosion pattern. Rates [of erosion] will be established by January [2007], substrata will be tested before July and the assessment and recommendations for controls will be completed within the fiscal year."

When I expressed concern that eighteen months was far too long to wait before taking action, I was reassured by the groups's recording secretary, Kathy Yuknavage, that the members "have assessed the island resources and have all agreed that no resources are at immediate peril....HPO [Historical Preservation Office] said that none of the artifacts found are of museum quality and money to remove them would be better spent surveying their location so the information is preserved." Nor is the shearwater's nesting - another major concern - being further impacted since the site has been expanded, she added.

As part of its deliberations, the group has identified a very instructive paper on coastal protection options, by ASR Ltd, a New Zealand firm - which can be found at <http://www.asrltd.co.nz/downloads/Reefs/reef%20general/An%20Assessment%20of%20Coastal%20Protection%20Options%20to%20Reduce%20Erosion.pdf>. The paper notes that "In most cases, classic hard engineering structures [e.g., sea walls, groynes and breakwaters] have negative impacts on both the natural and human environments. There is now a general push, from the public, the scientists, the engineers, the local government authorities and many other stakeholder groups, to use soft engineering options for coastal protection. 'Soft' engineering options such as beach nourishment, sediment by-passing, dune stabilisation and offshore submerged reefs, work with the natural processes by replenishing sediment supplies and modifying coastal processes (e.g. the waves and currents that drive erosion)."

In keeping with that finding, Tasi Tours has been authorized to "back-pass" sand - taking it from the growing beach and moving it back to the eroded portion - as a stop-gap measure until the study results are in. Noted Yuknavage, "We do not want to repeat the mistakes of 1996, and change something within the island's sand processes without understanding what the outcome of those actions may be.....We need to know how the island moves naturally before we can fix this current progression. One year is not so long for making a wise decision."

Managaha is one of the CNMI's most valuable natural resources, and in the midst of all the ongoing mayhem and turmoil on island, it sure is nice to know that at least some people in positions of responsibility are taking all the right steps to solve a critical island problem.

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A reader wrote, and because it is said far better than I could - in part because I confess I have not watched any of the events - I quote the message in its entirety: "I've been reading the

coverage of the Micronesian Games in the two papers. It seems to me it is all about the MEDALS and GOLD MEDALS at that. I haven't caught the coverage on the TV so perhaps the local network has covered more of the spirit of the games - camaraderie, sportsmanship, building friendships between islands and all the other grandiose ideals which were verbalized in order to bring the games to Saipan.

"But all I read about is the medals. I agree it's important to recognize medal performances but there is so much more to the games than that. I watched the coach for Pohnpei (Sweeter Daniels) walk up and down every length of that pool when her swimmers were doing a relay or another long swim event as she shouted words of encouragement to her young swimmers. And praising each and every one of them regardless of their finish in the race. And the smiles on the faces of her swimmers as they knew they had done their best and their coach was pleased.

"For me the spirit of the Games is Sweeter Daniels." I couldn't agree more.

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Perhaps it is because I tend to be skeptical by nature, but the announcement earlier this week that the governor was establishing a foundation - in his own name, at that - struck me as rather peculiar. Some say he is well off, so perhaps he is just trying to do something useful with his wealth, but the article in this past Monday's *Tribune* did not say anything about how large the initial endowment, if any, was. In two different parts of the article, in fact, mention was made that donors, sponsors and contributors were being encouraged, solicited.

Nor does there seem to be anything new, different, or special about what this foundation is supposed to accomplish. Its proposed projects are already being performed by other organizations on island. Perhaps there cannot be too many scholarships offered to island students, but why set up yet another program offering them, instead of augmenting, or perhaps offering to coordinate and enhance, the scholarship programs already in place? Pity the poor student, with yet another application form to fill out!

The same is true of the plan to hand out Thanksgiving grocery packages, Christmas gifts. There are programs in place that do this now. Wouldn't it make more sense to contribute to those, rather than set up competing programs? Either it will entail more paper work, in trying to figure out who is covered by which program, or the result will be both omissions and duplication of recipients.

One hopes, additionally, that the "rolling clinic" offering free test equipment for checking up on underprivileged patients with chronic diseases will be coordinated with the Department of Public Health and its established satellite clinics.

Not replicated elsewhere is the foundation's "Adopt a Community" program - which would provide disadvantaged communities with "several outreach programs" - but, according to the article, it is not funded, only seeking sponsors.

The juxtaposition with multimillionaire Warren Buffet, said to be the world's second-richest man, who recently gave the bulk of his estate to the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation, is interesting, to say the least. Buffet is quoted as saying, in this past Tuesday's *Tribune*, "What can be more logical in whatever you want done than finding someone better equipped than you are to do it?"

Moreover, it is difficult not to speculate on just why the foundation is being established now - in the first half of the governor's first year of his first term in office. Does he intend to "reward" those who donate to his foundation, who offer to sponsor its programs? To withhold

approval of projects whose proponents do not contribute?

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Left out of last week's column due to lack of space: I don't mean to sound like a grinch, but I confess it frustrates me to read articles in the papers that seem incomplete - that leave hanging questions one would have thought beg for answers. There was the one, for instance, about the fact that under a defined contribution plan, both members and the government might be required to pay a social security contribution as well. Why is that? What is there about a defined contribution plan, as opposed to a defined benefit plan, that makes that necessary? The article doesn't give a clue.

Then there was the one about the Public School System not having enough federal funds to buy food warmers for its schools. Apparently money was budgetted to do so, but inexplicably, now it wasn't available (though funds have since been found....). What happened to the original funding? Where did it go? Whose fault is it that it was no longer there? The article doesn't give a clue.

And the one about the government's being able to save about \$40 million since it has been excused, for a period of 18 months, from paying \$1 million per month to the Retirement Fund. I know my math is bad, but so far as I know, 18 x \$1 million does NOT equal \$40 million. Whose error was it - the reporter's or the source's? The article doesn't give a clue.

Admittedly, it is easier to think critically from afar, and reporters, facing a daily deadline, are usually pressed for time. But it sure would be nice if they could give us a fuller story more often.

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A letter to the editor in Wednesday's *Variety*, Thursday's *Trib*, answered a question I hadn't been able to figure out even whom to ask: where did that face/snake character painted on a tree stump on the road to Capitol Hill come from? Unfortunately, the answer has come as a result of its defacement by some dull and unimaginative vandal. What the letter's authors, Frank T. Pangelinan and Tehani S. Kirby, called it is a "creature" which, they explain, was painted by their father for his grand-daughter.

But now the "creature" has been smeared with ugly rust-colored paint. How sad! It had piqued my curiosity, and I kept waiting for more to appear keep it company. A series of them would have been a very special landmark attraction, for all to enjoy and wonder at. But thanks to stupid and destructive idiots, no one else will even be tempted to do anything like it again. That "crab" mentality sure is poisonous!

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On the air this week: Angelo Villagomez and Jeremy Shaw on KZMI on Saturday, KCNM on Sunday at 9:00 a.m., interviewed by Teny Topalian about the stream team and related projects.

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Movies this week: again, the listing in the two papers are in conflict: It's either 5 PG's, 2 PG 13's and 1 R, or it's 3 PG's, 4 PG 13's and 1 R. Caveat emptor, as they say!

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