

## **Makauwahi Cave Reserve in Transition**

The leaseholders of Makauwahi Cave Reserve, a popular site for visitors on Kauaʻi's south shore, are returning the property to the landowner, Grove Farm Company, on October 31.

Dr. David Burney and Lida Pigott Burney founded the reserve in 2004, as the culmination of a large research project they began there in 1992 with colleagues from the Smithsonian Institution and the late Dr. Pila Kikuchi of Kauaʻi Community College. Up to 80,000 people per year have visited the site in recent years, from local school groups to international visitors, touring the large limestone cave, hiking the trails, picnicking, and learning about the history and ecology of the spectacular Māhāʻulepū area.

Now the Burneys plan to retire from their roles in fundraising and managing their lease from Grove Farm. Uncertainty over Grove Farm's future plans for the property prompted the company's officials to tell the Burneys and their staff that no more grant-funding can be sought because the company did not wish to have any "encumbrances" on the property. What this meant for the future operation of the site was that a \$2.3 million grant Dr. Burney received for conservation initiatives, from the Department of Defense Readiness and Environmental Protection Initiative Challenge program via PMRF, was blocked by Grove Farm. A state grant for \$260,000 for community forestry and wildfire safety initiatives also could not be received.

Although the planning for these projects had been negotiated in advance with management at Grove Farm, staff turnovers there led to many changes. "We were informed in October last year that we had been converted to a month-to-month lease," Dr. Burney indicated. "Nobody can ask for grant funds or major donations when they don't even know if

they will be around in another month or two. Decades of experience here, and in our research projects on Madagascar and other islands, has taught us that long-term, trusting relationships with landowners is essential.”

For almost a year, the Cave Reserve has managed to stay open by expending two pre-existing grants, from the Hawaii Tourism Authority and Pacific Birds Habitat Joint Venture, with augmentation from the small donations from the many visitors. But “it takes more than that to pay our staff to provide tours for 200 or more people per day, while maintaining the restrooms, native plant nursery, and over 10,000 native and Polynesian plants translocated to abandoned quarry and farmland around the cave,” Lida Burney, the Reserve Manager, points out. “All the money is spent now, and as people in our mid-70’s, we can’t afford to dip into our personal savings to keep it going while Grove Farm decides what to do with the place,” she adds.

Staff members at Grove Farm have not shared with the Burneys their plans for the property. “It’s sad for Lida and me to give up after 33 years of working here, but it’s time, we feel, to shove this canoe offshore and see who paddles,” Dr. Burney observes.