

Kauai Islanders unfriend the Zuckerbergs



The tech titan has bought a property on the Hawaiian island of Kauai.

- By Keiran Southern
- The Times
- December 29, 2021

Mark Zuckerberg often finds friends hard to come by.

The founder of Facebook is used to fending off attacks, whether it be from politicians seeking to regulate his businesses or from former associates alleging he stole their ideas.

So it is perhaps unsurprising that the objections of local people have not deterred him from expanding his footprint in Hawaii.

The tech tycoon, who has an estimated fortune of dollars 125 billion, has bought more property on the island of Kauai, despite an online petition that accuses him of “colonising” the region attracting more than one million signatures.

Records show the world’s sixth-richest man used one of his companies to purchase a 110-acre site from the Pflueger family last month for dollars 17 million, the Honolulu Star-Advertiser reported.

The purchase encompasses most of a reservoir that unleashed a flood in 2006, killing seven people, including a pregnant woman. It resulted in James Pflueger, a wealthy car dealer, being sentenced to seven months in prison.



The Zuckerberg family. Mark Zuckerberg with wife Priscilla Chan and their two children.

Zuckerberg and his wife, Priscilla Chan, were committed to fulfilling legal requirements and promoting the safety of the reservoir, Ben LaBolt, a spokesman for the pair, said.

The couple, who already had 1,300 acres on the island, built a home there in 2017, with extensions in 2019. They have committed to not develop the property beyond their residence, according to LaBolt. They also plan to extend farming, conservation and wildlife protection work on the land, the representative said.

Whether those assurances ease the fears of local people remains to be seen.

Zuckerberg, 37, first incurred their ire in 2015 when he bought a 700-acre Kauai property and was later accused of attempting to force residents who owned small parcels of land near by to sell to him.

These families were said to have been Hawaiian descendants who inherited the land without a formal deed or will.

Zuckerberg was said to be attempting to coerce neighbours to sell up by filing several lawsuits that would have given them the choice of giving in or trying to outbid a billionaire at auction.

The lawsuits were eventually dropped but not before inflicting serious damage on Zuckerberg's standing on the island. He was accused of being "the face of neocolonialism" and attempting to wrest control of Hawaii from native people.



Zuckerberg is the founder of Facebook and has an estimated fortune of dollars 125 billion.

Residents have also complained about Zuckerberg disrupting their lives through the building of tall rock walls blocking ocean views from the region's main road and employing security teams accused of harassing people wanting to access a beach.

In January 2017 Zuckerberg published an article in a local newspaper, apologising for his approach to buying the land. He wrote: "We love Kauai and we want to be good members of the community for the long term. Thank you for welcoming our family into your community."

His words have not stopped the petition against his presence in Hawaii from growing. Set up two years ago, it accuses Zuckerberg of reprehensible behaviour in choosing the island for his home. It states: "He's building a mansion to what? Live in Kauai for two months out of the year?"

"This is inhuman. It is sick. He needs to be stopped. He could literally build a house anywhere else. There are plenty of open spaces no one has claimed. Yet he has to pick a place where people are trying to make a living and support their families? It's disgusting."

Zuckerberg and Chan have won some praise for their work in the Aloha State, however. Last month Kauai Habitat for Humanity, a non-profit organisation, announced that it had been awarded dollars 4.85 million in grants to build affordable housing from a community fund set up by the couple.

Away from Hawaii, Zuckerberg boasts a property portfolio befitting one of the richest people in history. He owns homes in Palo Alto, California, home to some of Silicon Valley's biggest names, as well as in Lake Tahoe on the Nevada border.