

Tuesday, November 12, 2002

## Briefing set on battle plan against invasive species

By Diana Leone

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The presence of some invasive plants, animals and insects in Hawaii is costing residents a lot of money, says Christy Martin, spokeswoman for the Coordinating Group on Alien Pest Species.

"We deal with pests every day, invasive pests that have gotten to our shores," Martin said. "The cost of tenting your house is due to invasives -- we have no native termites here."

Miconia and other water-hungry plants can deplete the recharge of aquifers, driving up the cost of water. Despite eradication efforts, the "green cancer" has been gaining ground, Martin said.

Then there are the coqui frogs, the alien seaweeds -- the list goes on.

Experts will update state lawmakers and the public on the battle against invasive species at 7-9 p.m. Thursday at the state Capitol auditorium.

Invasive species are pests with characteristics that cause ecological or economic harm to the state.

"We're hoping to arm everyone with this information so that we can work together on solutions this session," said Mark Fox, who works on invasive species issues for the Nature Conservancy.

>> One of several brief presentations Thursday will explain a new Weed Risk Assessment, a scientific questionnaire that can predict which plants might become a problem in Hawaii if imported here.

>> Neil Reimer of the state Department of Agriculture will report on how many alien insects were discovered in an experimental screening of air cargo at Kahului Airport.

>> Jeff Burgett of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service will report on steps taken to keep West Nile virus out of Hawaii.

>> Ellen VanGelder of the U.S. Geological Survey's Biological Resources Division will detail the potential cost of allowing red fire ants into the state. The ants have cost Texas about \$300 million a year.

Several pieces of legislation related to invasive species are on the drawing boards. Some are simple and cheap, such as releasing private landowners from liability if invasive-species workers are injured on their property, Martin said.

Others are more controversial, such as the idea of charging landing fees to airplanes and cargo ships to pay for increased screening for invasive pests.

New Zealand has an intensive screening to keep unwanted plants and animals out, and it seems to be working, Martin said.

Meanwhile, "Hawaii's control measures were adopted in the 1950s and don't address the way things are today in global society."

For more information about invasive species, see [www.hear.org/cgaps](http://www.hear.org/cgaps) or call Martin at 779-6767.

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