



PRESS RELEASE

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Subject: Weed Risk Assessment could have prevented *Salvinia* problem

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***Salvinia* Flunks Test**

The introduction of the invasive waterplant *Salvinia molesta* could have been prevented if the State had adopted and enforced Weed Risk Assessment system. This system is a screening process that uses a series of questions to determine if a plant will be invasive in Hawaii. The test asks questions about a plant's reproductive biology, the physical and environmental conditions that it does well in, and if it is a pest elsewhere. *Salvinia* has been recognized worldwide as a super-weed, and is cited as one of the "Top 10 Invaders" by The Nature Conservancy.

"An important indication of whether or not a plant will become a pest here is if it is a pest elsewhere in similar environments, said Dr. Curt Daehler, of the University of Hawaii Department of Botany. Daehler is part of a team that modified the Weed Risk Assessment system that is already in use in Australia and New Zealand. The system has shown tremendous capacity for protecting these island countries from new invasive plants.

Daehler and his team put *Salvinia* through the Weed Risk test, and it scored 29, which would indicate that it would be invasive in Hawaii. Plants that score in negative numbers, 1 or less, are non-pests. One example would be the plumeria, which scores -5. The invasive forest pest *Miconia* scored a 14, and is considered a pest, although it did not score as high as *Salvinia*.

Some of the reasons why *Salvinia* scored so high is due to its extremely rapid growth, it can double in size in just a few days, choking growth pattern, and the ease with which it is spread, both intentionally and accidentally.

Salvinia molesta is not the only plant pest we need to worry about,” Daehler warns. “*Hydrilla verticillata* and another *Salvinia*, *Salvinia minima*, are just a few aquatic plants that have the same weedy tendencies, and that’s just the aquatic plants. Some of the world’s most notorious weeds are not prohibited to import into our State, because they are not listed on the State Noxious Weed List.”

The State Noxious Weed List consists of 80 plants that are considered pests and therefore illegal to move from infested to uninfested areas within the state. The purpose of the list is to control the spread of pests in Hawaii, and does not address import issues. Problems with the current laws continue to place Hawaii at risk to invasion by new invasive plants. For example, the list focuses primarily on plants that show weedy tendencies, and many of the plants listed are current agricultural pests--they are placed on the list because they are already present and causing problems. Second, there are tens of thousands of plants in the world, and there is nothing stopping anyone from importing them. If they are not placed on the Noxious Weed List, they are OK.

“We need to really look at our State and Federal Noxious Weed Laws and ask ourselves if there is a better way of doing things today. If we were to ask these simple questions about a plant before inviting it into our State, we could save ourselves so much trouble,” said Christy Martin of CGAPS--the Coordinating Group on Alien Pest Species. The Weed Risk Assessment system has been tested in Hawaii, with participation from the green industry, but the next step is a big one. “People have to push for better pest prevention systems like this one. This is a pro-active alternative to the status quo.”

CGAPS is a statewide partnership of government agencies and NGOs working together to close the gaps in Hawaii’s biosecurity. CGAPS partners meet regularly to discuss the most threatening alien pests, current actions on existing pests, and plan protection systems capable of detecting and keeping out the next silent invader.

The Invasive Species Committees of Hawaii are grassroots partnerships of government agencies, private businesses and non-profit organizations working together to control or eradicate the worst pest species that threaten each island. The ISCs are:

Kauai Invasive Species Committee (KISC)

Oahu Invasive Species Committee (OISC)

Maui Invasive Species Committee (MISC) and the Molokai subcommittee (MoMISC)

Big Island Invasive Species Committee (BIISC)

For more information on CGAPS or the ISCs, visit www.hear.org

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