

**Big Island Invasive Species Committee
Field Operations Working Group**

**Meeting Minutes
July 17, 2003
HDOA Conference Room**

Present: Working Group: Laura Hillis, Jim Jacobi, Pat Conant, Tim Tunison, Julie Denslow
Field Operations Staff: Greg Santos, Kim Tavares, Cheyenne Perry
Guests: David Benitez, Rob Culbertson, David Saulibio

Minutes: Minutes of the March 20, 2003 meeting were approved.

Joint BIISC/NPS project for Volcano. Tim introduced Rob Culbertson, the new RCUH staff person supported jointly by BIISC and NPS to conduct surveys for coqui, *Miconia*, and Australian tree fern in Volcano village and the vicinity of the Park.

NPS Exotic Plant Management Team. Tim explained that this NPS invasive species swat team would be based at HVNP after October 1, 2003 for at least 2 years. A steering committee will determine priority projects for this group based on an evaluation of proposals. Their focus will be a balance between incipient invasives outside of the Park and other plant pests within the Park. The team will consist of a supervisor and 4 team members with an annual budget of ca. \$200k. There may be a good opportunity here for BIISC to submit a proposal for priority projects, although the Steering Committee has not yet met or set guidelines. We agreed that Tim, Jim, Pat, Laura, and Julie would meet to discuss proposal strategies once the guidelines were released.

Proposed Quality Control Protocol. Cheyenne presented the draft of a plan to provide quality checks for *Miconia* detection and kill rates by the crews. Initial results suggest that all treated plants are killed in dense stands, and that crews are not detecting all outlying plants. Discussion focused on the high priority for implementation of this QC protocol, its utility in providing feedback to improve our field operations, and the need to include all areas to which we send field crews as candidates for a QC check. A sample (ca. 10%) of all treated areas will be assessed within 6 mos of treatment. Selected control blocks will be sampled (approximately 10%) of the area revisited during the QAQC assessment. The people involved with the QAQC reassessment will not attempt to kill any missed plants within the assessment block; if any unkilld or missed plants are found, the entire block should be retreated as soon as possible (i.e., within the next 6 months at most).

Cheyenne was commended for taking the lead in designing and implementing such a plan.

Proposed Strategy Review Protocol. Julie provided an update on progress toward the design of an assessment protocol designed to evaluate the effectiveness of our approach in containing the

spread of *Miconia* to the core population. Discussion revealed a clear need to determine how these two QC approaches differ and/or overlap. The Strategy Review will help us evaluate the effectiveness of project accomplishments to date (e.g., including current abundance and sizes of *Miconia* in areas visited since the start of the project, regrowth rates, refinement of guidelines for revisit intervals, and spread of *Miconia* to areas where not detected previously).

Field work update. Cheyenne provided a brief update on the activities of the field crews. He mentioned the need to confirm a rumored sighting of *Miconia* in Waimanu Valley and said that Honalo and Honaunau were high priorities for revisits. The committee thanked Cheyenne for a job well done. Jim asked Kim about progress on clearing the database backlog. Kim said that she needed ca. 1 week of work to complete entry of the backlog.

Budget: Reduction in state pass-through and supplemental funds. Greg reported on his analyses of the impact to the field operations of a 20% reduction in pass-through and supplemental funds from the State (ca. \$27000). He found that we would still be able to bring on a second crew as planned and provide for a 2 month carryover buffer before the start of funding for FY05. If the cut does not materialize, we would be able to extend the crew to 2 more months. For next FY we are assuming constant FWS funds.

Personnel Management. Greg described current efforts to evaluate the crew more effectively and presented a working document highlighting his proposed approach. He noted that although morale is not high, crew members work well when they show up, but unplanned leave is a constant problem. He expressed frustration at getting clear guidelines from either PCSU or RCUH as to how to handle unsatisfactory employees. Tim discussed the approach used in the Park. Suggestions included 1) making more seasonal appointments with a fixed season of perhaps 8 mos after which time the entire crew would be dismissed; 2) making emergency hires targeted at specific, limited-duration subprojects, with those staff dismissed at the end of the project. This can be done with subprojects within single budget codes; 3) Establishment of a strict leave request protocol to provide a mechanism for dismissing employees who do not follow it. The committee strongly encouraged Greg to begin implementation of some of these approaches rather than waiting for PCSU to provide approval for an overall approach. Jim suggested that a broad program overview, including staffing policies, should be the focus of the committee in the near future.

Strategies for Scheduling Helicopter Flights. Pat made the suggestion that helicopter surveys should precede surveys by ground crews whenever possible. In some cases, as when there is dense uluhe cover, helicopter surveys are more successful than ground surveys and can save the ground crews considerable effort. He suggested using helicopter surveys to designate large GPSed polygons of vegetation cover (e.g. dense tree canopy, open uluhe cover, etc) that could be targeted for either helicopter or ground crew survey for *Miconia* to use the two methods more effectively.

The lack of trained helicopter spotting staff was also discussed; the committee generally agreed that we needed more trained scouters from among the ground crew but emphasized that scouters should be adequately trained and evaluated and that we should be careful to not dilute flights with untrained personnel.

***Bocconia* investation in Wood Valley.** David Benitez provided a report on his findings of the distribution of *Bocconia* in Wood Valley and other South Kona areas. He identified 3 main populations in this area (Wood Valley – ca. 1522 ha; Honomolino – ca. 250 ha; Manuka – ca. 34 ha). In addition *Bocconia* is common in the drainages mauka of the highway and was found in at least 19 small outlying populations (< 10 ha). *Bocconia* requires high light levels, shows an affinity for canopy gaps, and is likely dispersed by animals (birds, cattle, bulldozers). David estimates that Ka'u Forest reserve is not strongly threatened except along roadsides and that the mixed alien dry forest may be too dense for *Bocconia* to develop dense populations. He concluded that *Bocconia* overall seemed to be so widespread that eradication did not seem to be practical in the near future, although the Manuka and Honomolino populations could be eradicated. He recommended a strategy of containing and working inward on the population in Wood Valley. He estimated 70 person days to eradicate 19 outlying populations less than 10ha each. However, all areas would need to be revisited to deal with seeds in the soil.

BIISC strategies for addressing non-*Miconia* invasives. The committee used the questions raised by the *Bocconia* report to discuss a process by which we might most effectively marshal our resources to limit spread and impact of other non-*Miconia* invasive species. We discussed a number of components of such a decision process including the project impact of the plant, its current distribution and population size, mode of dispersal, financial and personnel resources available, availability of an effective control technology, the prospects for long vs short term control efforts, and prospects for introduction of biological control agents. Pat suggested a flow chart to show how this process might operate (see attachment). We agreed to use the excellent information available for *Bocconia* and *Miconia* as case studies for development of such an evaluation process and decided that we would devote a substantial amount of time at our next meeting toward working through a process for these two species.

Next meeting: September 9, 2003, 10:00 AM, HDOA Conference Room.

Adjourned: 4:15 PM