



PRESS RELEASE

Date: 8/30/04, for immediate release

Pages: 6 (press release, 3 pages; Brown Treesnake Fact Sheet, 3 pages)

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Guam Brown Treesnake Containment Activities Cut

Brown treesnake interdiction activities on Guam will be significantly reduced due to continued funding shortfalls according to the USDA-Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service-Wildlife Services. **The agency anticipates up to a 50% reduction in snake containment conducted at Department of Defense ports of exit on Guam as of October 1.**

Wildlife Services employs 25 full-time snake trappers and 9 canine handlers, to minimize the chance of brown treesnakes being accidentally transported off the island of Guam in commercial and military cargo, vehicles, and vessels. These interdiction efforts at Guam's Won Pat International Airport, Harmon Industrial Area, and Commercial Port are funded through the United States Department of Interior's Office of Insular Affairs. As interdiction needs have grown in recent years, funding from the Department of Interior Office of Insular Affairs has increased accordingly.

However, funding for brown treesnake interdiction efforts at U.S Department of Defense facilities, specifically Andersen Air Force Base and U.S. Navy Port Facilities in Apra Harbor, has not increased substantially since this program was established 11 years ago.

Of the 6,000 brown treesnakes removed annually from Guam's 5 ports of exit, nearly 2/3 of the snakes are removed from cargo facilities operated by the Air Force and the Navy.

It is also anticipated that military operations on Guam will grow due to expansion of Andersen Air Force Base and U.S. Navy Port Facilities in Apra Harbor over the next few years ensuring additional chances for snakes to be transported on military planes, ships and cargo departing from Guam, bound for worldwide destinations.

"The military has a responsibility to ensure that they are not transporting this extremely damaging pest to all islands and countries receiving cargo and vessels from Guam. The cost of USDA Wildlife Services efforts to keep snakes from transport should be considered a necessary part of operating on Guam," said Christy Martin of the Hawaii Coordinating Group on Alien Pest Species.

“The level of support for brown treesnake interdiction programs needs to be directly related to the volume of military and commercial traffic leaving Guam, said Mindy Wilkinson, Invasive Species Coordinator for the Hawaii Department of Land and Natural Resources. “If the level of support for brown treesnake interdiction is not increased the State of Hawaii is at significant risk from the accidental introduction of brown treesnakes.”

Previous funding shortfalls for the Wildlife Services brown treesnake interdiction program on Guam have been circumvented by additional funding received through a variety of sources. Unfortunately, USDA - APHIS - Wildlife Services no longer has the adequate funds required to sustain a comprehensive brown treesnake interdiction program on Guam. To accommodate for recent funding shortfalls, Wildlife Services has had to cut four full-time field positions and anticipates cutting an additional 8 positions on or immediately after October 1.

Additional Information and Quotes

*(see also the **Brown Treesnake Fact Sheet for information on sightings/captures around the world**)*

“Any decrease in the operations of USDA-APHIS-Wildlife Services puts the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands and other Pacific islands at an unacceptable level of risk from this pest,” said Nate Hawley, Brown Treesnake Interdiction Program Supervisor for the CNMI.

“Decrease in support for snake interdiction activities on Guam by USDA-APHIS-Wildlife Services will only increase the likelihood of snakes arriving in Hawaii from military or commercial transport, said Domingo Cravalho of the Hawaii Department of Agriculture. “This program needs to be adequately supported.”

“Eliminating the chance that snakes are accidentally transported off of Guam is the only cost-effective solution to prevent the decimation of avifauna on other Pacific islands,” stated Earl Campbell, Invasive Species Coordinator for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Pacific Island Fish and Wildlife Office.

The brown treesnake was likely introduced to the island of Guam in materials moved by the military during the late 1940’s. The snake has caused, and continues to cause, significant economic, ecological, and human health impacts to this U.S. Territory in the Western Pacific. The brown treesnake is responsible for the extinction of 9 of 13 native forest bird species on Guam. The brown treesnake causes frequent electrical power outages and is a concern for human health and safety. Snakes currently occur at high densities on Guam and there is a significant risk that these snakes will be transported off Guam in military or civilian cargo.

Experts estimate the potential economic impact to Hawaii would be between \$400 million and \$1.8 billion annually.

Since 1993, the USDA - Wildlife Services program has managed a successful containment program on Guam to prevent the inadvertent spread of the brown treesnake via cargo traffic to other Pacific islands including Hawaii. The program operates some 3,000 brown treesnake traps, conducts nightly spotlight searches for snakes climbing on harbor and airport fence lines and

uses specially trained snake detector dogs to search cargo and vessels departing from the islands five major ports of exit.

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