



COORDINATING GROUP ON  
ALIEN PEST SPECIES

***Miconia: The Time Bomb in Our Watershed***  
*Submitted to the Ala Wai Watershed Newsletter, 1/21/03*

Few people are aware of the time bomb hidden away and ticking in our watershed. If it is allowed to explode, this bomb could severely reduce the amount of water percolating through the soil, while promoting soil erosion, landslides and runoff into the ocean. This time bomb is *Miconia* (*Miconia calvescens*), a tree native to Central and South America, which was planted as an ornamental in Hawaii in the 1960's. *Miconia* has been found in several areas on O`ahu, two of which are on the hillsides in Manoa Valley and in the Tantalus-Makiki area.

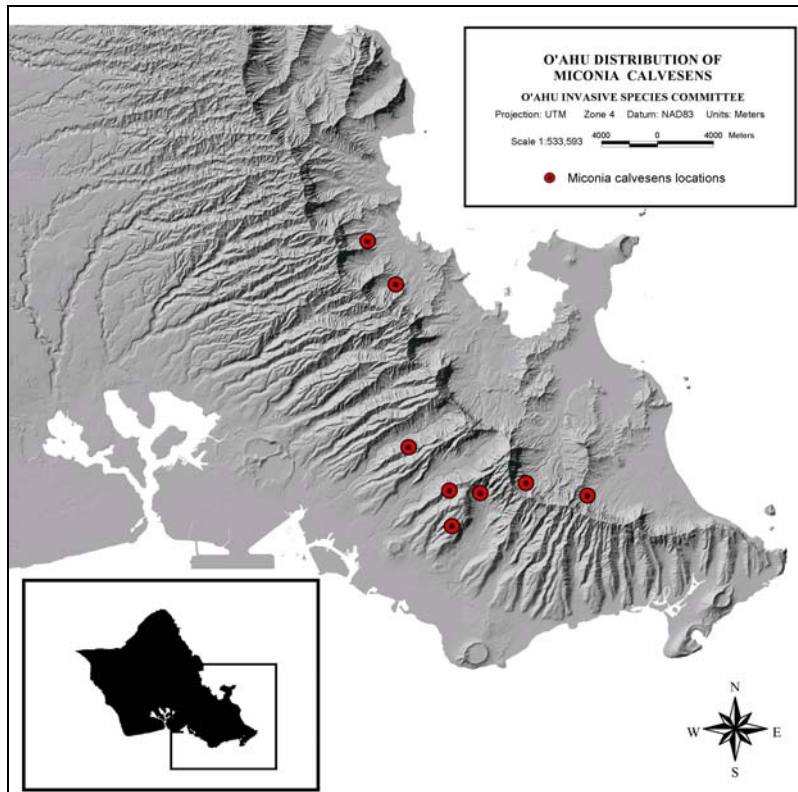
*Miconia* is an unusually aggressive invader of moist and wet forests. It out-competes other plants by growing close together and blocking sunlight and rain from reaching the ground layer. Our knowledge of the damage that can be done by *Miconia* is not just a theory--it is based on the devastation it has caused on the island of Tahiti where it was planted as an ornamental in 1937. Since the 1970's it has been the dominant plant on the island and it now forms a single-species expanse covering 2/3rds of the island. The decimation of Tahitian native species is irreversible. Over 40 native species are directly threatened with extinction due to *Miconia*.

Unfortunately, few hydrologic studies have been conducted to determine the impact of *Miconia* on watershed services. However, studies of a South African watershed that was cleared of native species and subsequently planted with alien trees have shown that there is a 30 to 80 percent decrease in the amount of water flow.

How do we diffuse this time bomb? We can support efforts to search for and control *Miconia*. With each mature tree producing millions of seeds per year, it is imperative that we look for and kill every seeding tree to stop the explosive spread of this tree. The Oahu Invasive Species Committee (OISC) and the Sierra Club Hawaii Chapter run volunteer service trips for the able-bodied to control *Miconia*. If crawling up the side of Manoa Valley is not your cup of tea, pick up the phone and call your legislators and the Honolulu City Council and ask for their support in funding these efforts through the DLNR budget and any other funding mechanism available.

One last thing that everyone can do is to landscape responsibly. Ask for natives or non-invasive plants. If the plants you are planting produce a lot of seeds or if they spread quickly, remove them and select something else. Better yet, do some web-research on the plants you are thinking of buying. Go to a search engine, type in the name of the plant and the word "invasive" to see if it has a history of being invasive.

For more information on *Miconia* Service Trips, contact OISC at [oisc@hawaii.edu](mailto:oisc@hawaii.edu). Visit the Hawaiian Ecosystems At Risk (HEAR) website at [www.hear.org](http://www.hear.org) for information on the Silent Invasion. Click on HORTWEEDS on the left hand navigator bar for information on the most invasive plants in horticulture.



Current known areas with *Miconia* on O`ahu.

Article submitted by Christy Martin, Public Information Officer for the Coordinating Group on Alien Pest Species (CGAPS) and the Invasive Species Committees (ISCs) on each island. For more information or for outreach presentations, contact CGAPS at 722-0995.

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