



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

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Thanks to All for Working to Protect Hawaii from Brown Treesnakes

Once again, the people of Hawaii and other snake-free islands in the Pacific can breathe a sigh of relief that the USDA – Wildlife Services has received funding to continue to ensure that brown treesnakes are kept out of the transportation networks. Late last week, Senator Daniel Inouye's office announced that the U.S. Air Force and U.S. Navy have signed documents that would provide \$2 million to bridge the funding shortfall for brown treesnake prevention activities through the end of this fiscal year.

USDA – Wildlife Services runs the Brown Treesnake Interdiction Program on Guam. They use dogs and handlers to inspect out-going cargo, ships and planes for brown treesnakes, and trap for snakes around ports of exit. The program currently has 55 staff to search commercial and military cargo, planes and ships departing Guam. The program was at risk of losing 27 staff on May 31, 2007, if funding for inspections on Department of Defense facilities were not found.

Thank you to Senator Inouye and the Hawaii congressional delegates, thank you to Governor Lingle, the U.S. Department of Defense and the agencies for working together to find a solution to this problem. A huge mahalo also goes out to the people of Hawaii that called and wrote to offer support, and to the media for keeping the people informed on this issue that affects us all.

It may be of interest to everyone to know that although more than half of the USDA – Wildlife Services staff on the Guam front line received 60 day notices, and 30-day pink slips on May 1, none of the 27 staff (and 14 canines) had left their positions for more stable jobs. They wanted to stay because they believe in what they are doing, and they believed that a solution would be found. It is gratifying to see so many people work together for a common purpose.

Although this is a happy end to this chapter, more work is on the way. These funds will last until the end of September 30, 2007, and permanent funding mechanisms are still being sought. Future funding will also need to take into account the impending military buildup of as many as 30,000 people and increased military training exercises on Guam, as well as new cargo routes to support the island's transportation needs. All of these activities will necessitate brown treesnake prevention measures, which will require additional money and staff. Continued communication and cooperation between all agencies, offices and the public is crucial in this ongoing effort to protect Pacific islands from brown treesnakes, while maintaining effective transportation networks and an able military.

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Christy Martin is the Public Information Officer for the statewide Coordinating Group on Alien Pest Species (CGAPS).