



PRESS RELEASE

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Pages: 2

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Saturday: Weeding “Gorilla Ogo” from Coral Garden



More than 50 community volunteers are expected to help rid the reef of the invasive algae “gorilla ogo” on Saturday, June 18.

The clean-up is from 7:30 a.m. – 12 noon at the Waikiki Marine Life Conservation District, at the ewa end of the Natatorium (behind the Waikiki Aquarium).

Gorilla ogo grows quickly and forms dense mats over the reef, overgrowing and killing coral and other seaweeds. Reefs infested with gorilla ogo cannot support the multitude of reef dwellers we are used to seeing on healthy reefs.

Event coordinator Signe Opheim notes that, “More than 85 tons of invasive seaweed has been removed by volunteers so far. Volunteers are making a difference in protecting Hawaii’s nearshore resources.”

UH scientific scuba divers will remove the gorilla ogo from the reef and volunteer snorkelers will transport them to shore in burlap bags floated on boogie boards and surfboards. Volunteers will sort invasive seaweed from any native seaweed and creatures, which are returned to the reef. Biologists will be on-hand to help volunteers identify native and invasive species. At the end of the day, the invasive seaweed is carted away to be turned into free, mineral-rich compost.

Gorilla ogo (*Gracilaria salicornia*) is native to the western Pacific and Indian Oceans. It was introduced in 1971 to several of Hawaii’s reefs for aquaculture purposes, and it has been spreading since. Currently there is no technology or method to eradicate this seaweed—periodically removing the seaweed by hand is necessary for protecting reef diversity.

(more)

Researchers have been able to measure the tremendous effect of this particular seaweed at the Waikiki Marine Life Conservation district. Before the 1970's scientists counted more than 60 different species living on the reef (including fish, coral, crabs, snails, etc.). By 2002 the number of species had dropped to 20, and gorilla ogo is by far the most common thing seen.

The event is being sponsored by the Coordinating Group on Alien Pest Species (CGAPS) and the Hawaii Tourism Authority, with the help of the University of Hawaii Department of Botany, UH Marine Option Program, Division of Aquatic Resources, The Nature Conservancy of Hawaii, Hawaii Earth Products, and the Waikiki Aquarium.

Additional Information

An excellent short explanation about the severity of this issue can be found here <http://sgnis.org/publicat/squasmith.htm>

Photos and maps

<http://www.botany.hawaii.edu/GradStud/smith/websites/Gsal-home.htm>

Christy Martin is the Public Information Officer for the statewide Coordinating Group on Alien Pest Species (CGAPS). CGAPS has recently expanded its focus from primarily terrestrial invasive species, and now includes aquatic invasive species issues.