



Hawaii Invasive Species Council

“Weed Risk Assessment”

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Since human arrival began more than 10,000 flowering plant species have been introduced to Hawaii from every major continent in the world. Approximately 1,215 are now naturalized, sustaining themselves without cultivation and establishing populations in the wild. Currently, 107 plant species are considered “invasive” because they compete with native plants in natural areas and in time, dozens of additional species could start to spread. More than 91 percent of these were intentionally introduced as ornamentals, forestry trees, medicinal plants, food sources and other uses. With an estimated 260,000 species of flowering plants worldwide, many more species may be introduced by gardeners, landscapers, plant collectors and nurseries.

The Hawaii-Pacific Weed Risk Assessment (HPWRA) is a proactive tool that aids in early detection and prioritization for control of potentially invasive plants that can negatively impact Hawaii’s economy and environment. This system of assessing and documenting introduced and non-native plants helps predict which species pose a risk of invasiveness and provides current information that helps in management decisions, such as targeting a specific species for localized control.

“The Hawaii Invasive Species Council provides HPWRA as a free assessment service available to the public, as well as to the University of Hawaii, the Bishop Museum, the Pacific Invasives Learning Network, federal agencies, watershed partnerships, private plant growers and landscape professionals,” said Patti Clifford, HISC’s Weed Risk Assessment Specialist. “We also prioritize incipient species as requested by the Invasive Species Committees or other entities.”

The system is also being used to identify low and high risk crops proposed for biofuel development in Hawaii and the Pacific. Screenings of species that are being considered for import into Hawaii receive



Milk thistle (Silybum marianum) ranked a WRA high risk score of 17.5.

—photo by Forest and Kim Starr

priority over species that are already present in the environment. As of September 2009, the HPWRA has completed 847 assessments which were assigned to categories of “High Risk,” “Low Risk” or “Evaluate.”

Ongoing objectives of the HPWRA as outlined in the HISC Strategic Plan for 2008-2013 are to develop a comprehensive “approved planting list” to ensure that invasive species are not being planted in State projects or by any State contractors, screening to be conducted by the Weed Risk Assessment protocol; and to develop collaborative industry guidelines and Codes of Conduct, which minimize or eliminate unintentional introductions.

The HPWRA has led to the adoption of voluntary “Codes of Conduct” by various industry groups, as well as private business owners, who now agree to use the system before making decisions on importing plants into Hawaii or maintaining existing questionable species. Signers include the Oahu Nursery Growers Association, the Kauai Landscape Industry Council, the Maui Association of Landscape Professionals, the Hawaii Island Landscape Association, Lyon Arboretum and the National Tropical Botanical Garden. The system also recommends low risk alternatives to invasive plants in public and private landscape and horticulture projects.

HPWRA is nearing completion of a searchable database to help analyze general data trends and assess how the system can better serve its users. Funds are being sought for the development of a user-friendly Web site to help the promotion and adoption of the HPWRA.



Call the Pest Hotline to report invasive pests.