



PRESS RELEASE

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Statewide Invasive Species Committees Join Forces in Koke`e

Lihue, HI—For the first time in their history, statewide Invasive Species Committees, also known as “The ISCs,” gathered together on Kaua‘i for a collaborative, four day service trip in one of Hawai‘i’s most treasured natural areas, Koke‘e State Park. Sixty-three staff members from Kaua‘i (KISC), O‘ahu (OISC), Maui (MISC), Moloka‘i (MoMISC), and Big Island (BIISC) started their trek up the mountain on September 9, with the goal of making a significant impact on the invasive species that threaten Kaua‘i’s native ecosystems, where many endangered flora and fauna call home.

The introductory safety briefing was given by Dr. Cliff Smith, who has been a pioneer in the invasive species field through his work with the University of Hawai‘i. Since conception, the Invasive Species Committees have grown tremendously over the years. Thirty years ago, Dr. Smith was among those who believed that we could make a real difference when it comes to invasive species in Hawai‘i. He was amazed to see that now the idea has developed into formidable teams on each island that are supported by innovative and committed partnerships, each adapted to address their own unique island-based invasive species targets and issues.

The ISC partnerships are composed of federal and state government agencies, non-government organizations, and private business all working together with paid dedicated ISC staff. Invasive species know no boundaries, and so they demonstrate the necessity of statewide and islandwide collaboration and coordination. The ISCs do not have base funding and so grants and these partnerships are vital to their sustainability. The ISCs were created to serve as a rapid response team that would have the resources to tackle incipient invasive species that pose the highest threat to our environment, agriculture, economy, and/or health. The target incipient species vary from ISC to ISC, with population numbers that make island control or elimination possible. Miconia has not yet been detected on Moloka‘i, and so MoMISC concentrates on other species like Australian tree fern, which is in much smaller numbers there than on neighbor islands.

Even though these committees are fairly new (the oldest, MISC, formed in 1997, the newest, KISC, formed in 2001), they have had a lot of quantifiable successes since their inception. Populations of things like coqui frogs, miconia, little fire ant, and fountain grass would be at drastically increased population levels and more widely distributed without the ISC teams. They have prevented the spread of many high profile invasive

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species, contained them in limited numbers, and/or removed them completely from their island. Because of the ISCs, fireweed populations did not explode after being introduced on Kauaʻi, fountain grass has not spread to the dry forests of Waianae on Oʻahu, pampas grass was removed from gardens before spreading on Molokaʻi, miconia has not taken over East Maui's native forest, and community groups and landowners have joined BIISC to help control plume poppy on the Big Island.

The service trip to Kokeʻe presented another opportunity to make a difference. The focus on incipient species often leads the ISC field crew's work into lowland areas, which are often dominated by alien species. Working in Kokeʻe showed them the connection between their efforts and native species. "It is good to experience different landscapes and see native plants that you don't get to see," says Lori Buchanan, Manager of MoMISC, "It inspires us to continue working under challenging conditions to preserve Hawaiʻi's biodiversity." Buchanan also said that she knows her sole field crew staff member from Molokaʻi, Kamalani Pali, truly appreciated the chance to meet others who do the same type of work.

The ISCs partnered with the local Kokeʻe Resource Conservation Program (KRCP), who is dedicated to managing some of the invasive species in this precious area. KRCP, who is sponsored by the Garden Island Resource Conservation & Development, Inc., is a collaborative project with DLNR's Division of State Parks and Division of Forestry and Wildlife. It involves coordination of volunteers to remove invasive weeds from selected areas of Koke'e's native forest. KRCP's use of volunteers gets a larger job done, as well as raises community awareness about the need for partnerships and community-based management of the unique ecosystems of Koke'e and the Alakaʻi Wilderness Preserve.

The impressive lineup of ISC and KRCP staff working hand in hand to remove weeds from the forest attained the goal of making a significant impact. The total numbers of weeds removed were astounding: 28,927 kahili ginger, 891 privet, 4682 strawberry guava, and 1701 smokebush. Total acreage covered was 25.4 in the buddleia area and 2.4 in the ginger area. Total work hours were 972! Katie Cassel, Coordinator for KRCP, said, "the donation of this much time is a tremendous boon for Kokeʻe, as we were able to tackle weeds and areas that would not have been otherwise very feasible with our small staff. The Smokebush (*Buddleia madagascariensis*), in particular, has been noted by local leaseholders to be spreading much further and more rapidly than ever before. This ISC project allowed us to treat the entire large core. And, a big mahalo to Mike Faye, who shared his cabin with us to use as a staging area."

The native forests on the Kokeʻe plateau in northwest Kauaʻi represent some of the most diverse and botanically rich forests in Hawaiʻi. Ensuring the continued existence of native dominance and regeneration in these plant communities is crucial to preserving local and global biodiversity, as well as preserving a cherished cultural resource. The entire native plant communities exist nowhere else on earth. "We really appreciate all the hard work of the ISC's, and particularly the public outreach work they do to raise awareness of the devastating effects of invasive weeds on our ecosystems," Cassel said.

In addition to removing this magnitude of weeds from the heart of the Garden Isle, the ISCs also concentrated on teambuilding activities, exchanging information and strategy techniques, and deepening the `ohana connection that is felt between these stewards of the `aina across the archipelago. “It helped us realize that we are a part of a statewide movement and reaffirmed for the field crews that what they do is really important,” said OISC Manager Rachel Neville, “seeing Koke`e and being reminded of what a Hawaiian forest is supposed to look like, reminded me of why we get up every morning.”

Many of the participants, although some born and raised in Hawai‘i, had never had the opportunity to visit Koke`e, so they also enjoyed their hike on Pihea Trail for the breathtaking view of Kalalau Valley, an image that is synonymous with Kaua‘i.

When asked what this experience meant to him, Joe Kona, KISC Field Operations Leader said, "This trip gave all of the ISC workers a chance to meet each other, which we've never been able to do before. It was a great idea for getting the field crews together to hear about work being done on other islands.” Neville agreed and added, “The field crews are dedicated and work really hard because they love Hawai‘i and want to make sure our unique environment is still around for the next generation.”

For more information on Invasive Species Committees in Hawai‘i, check out the website at <http://www.hawaiiinvasivespecies.org/iscs/> or contact your local committee.

If you are interested in volunteering in Koke`e, please contact KRCP at rcp@aloha.net or by calling (808) 335-0045. Housing is available for off island volunteers.

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The Kauai Invasive Species Committee (KISC) is a voluntary partnership of government, private and non-profit organizations, and concerned individuals working to prevent, control, or eliminate the most threatening invasive plant and animal species in order to preserve Kauai's native biodiversity and minimize adverse ecological, economic and social impacts.