

**WEED OF THE WEEK**  
**JULY 9 2008**

**FEATURED SPECIES: FIREWEED *Senecio madagascariensis***

This week, we will start with two quotes that give an interesting perspective on how we can consider the impact of invasive species to the balance of our unique ecosystems on Kaua'i.

The first is from our U.S. Senator, Daniel Akaka, and the next is from a National Geographic article about invasive species that highlighted our challenges in Hawai'i.

1. *"Because of our climate, Hawai'i is heaven-on-earth, for weeds. [Now], foreign introduced plants outnumber Hawaii's rich heritage of native species. Hawai'i is the Aloha State, but we have no aloha for alien weeds. We need to start thinking of noxious weeds as biological pollution."*
2. *"Invasives aren't like other forms of pollution, they don't stop spreading when you stop releasing them. They grow."*

As these quotes point out, once an invasive species is introduced to Hawai'i, it can be very difficult to remove and manage it. But, there are success stories! Today's featured weed is one of them...

Fireweed was accidentally introduced to Kaua'i by hydro-mulch from Australia that unknowingly contained some of the seeds. Fireweed is also a huge problem in Australia, costing them \$2 million per year in losses and management. First found here roadside at Halfway Bridge in the 1990s, fireweed became a top target of our local Hawai'i Department of Agriculture (HDOA) because of its agricultural impacts. Fireweed invades pastures and is extremely toxic to cattle, horses, and other livestock, making them very ill and stunting their growth. Fireweed can even cause death to farm animals. Already an issue for ranches on Maui and Big Island, we were hoping to keep this weed from spreading on our rural island. When KISC first partnered with HDOA to search for and hand pull the fireweeds at Halfway Bridge in 2002, we were finding thousands of plants per year. **In 2006, we found ZERO!**

The crew continues to monitor the area, because the seeds can remain viable for a long time. We also continue to survey for new populations. Fireweed was again introduced to Kaua'i by hydro-mulch to a residence in Kalihiwai. With rapid response, this population was quickly eradicated. But, the small seeds can easily hitchhike on vehicles and shoes and could be introduced from neighbor islands again. There are large infestations on Maui and Big Island, which are too widespread for control. HDOA has also been working with the Department of Transportation to decrease the use of carpet seeding for roadside landscaping projects, to prevent further accidental introductions of weed seeds.

**Together, we can be on the lookout for fireweed!** It is easy to identify. The best way is to count the petals on this daisy-like herb. Each yellow flower, which is about the size of a nickel, is asymmetrical with **13 petals**. When the flowers mature, they change into white thistle balls. The plant can grow to about 20 inches.

**If you see fireweed, please call the pest hotline at 643-PEST (7873), which routes you to your local HDOA for help. By keeping Kaua'i fireweed free, we can protect our agriculture and farm animals!**