

**WEED OF THE WEEK**  
**AUGUST 20, 2008**

**FEATURED SPECIES: LONG THORN KIAWE**  
*Prosopis juliflora*

Often, as we have discussed on this program, alien plants are introduced for their ornamental beauty. I have heard people comment when viewing displays at the KISC booth that it is hard to believe that something so beautiful could be a weed! Unlike snakes and biting ants, plants don't always look the part of an "invasive species." We do have one, however, that does a pretty good job of appearing like a wicked weed, which is today's featured weed of the week: Long Thorn Kiawe.

Many of us have had the irritating experience of getting a common kiawe thorn in our slipper. It's just long enough to poke its tip into our feet, and we have to casually take the slipper off and pull the buggah out. But, imagine a thorn so long that it pierced well beyond the rubber of your slipper making its way deeper into your foot. A thorn so long that it punctures right through your boot and could even pop your car or truck tire! Can you imagine walking to the shore of your favorite beach, pulling up your truck for a family picnic, or watching your keiki run around in bare feet and have to worry about such a thing happening?

Unlike common kiawe, Long Thorn Kiawe has thorns that can grow up to three inches in length! And to add insult to injury, they have toxins in the point of the thorn that can cause a nasty bruise in addition to your puncture wound. This invasive species is often a favorite at school presentations because, as the students say, "Whoa that looks mean!"

There is nothing pretty about Long Thorn Kiawe. And in a state that so values beach access, this weed could cause some serious blockades. It grows in dense thickets, causing an impenetrable bramble, which is also inhospitable to nesting birds. It out-competes our precious coastal native species, like pohuehue, naupaka, and nanea, preventing anything but its own seedlings from growing beneath the mess of thorny branches.

Understandably, this beast of a weed is not altogether pleasant to work around. The hardworking KISC and HDOA (Hawai'i Department of Agriculture) field crews brave the hot sun to cut back and remove these plants to clear the way for beach access. True weed warriors, they often come back with cuts and bruises, and even had to

buy steel plated boots after one crewmember had a thorn tear right through his leather work boot.

But thankfully, their hard work, dedication, and care have already shown real progress. They successfully removed a population from Maha`ulepu, which is a frequented and treasured spot on our island for many activities, including fishing and family gatherings. Maha`ulepu also hosts a variety of our native coastal plants, which demonstrates the diversity and beauty an ecosystem that has largely been disturbed.

In partnership with the Pacific Missile Range Facility, KISC also helped to remove large patches found on military base land using heavy machinery. Shortly after, natural recruitment of native species occurred, and wedge-tailed shearwaters reclaimed a home for bearing their young.

KISC and HDOA continue to work on populations from Pakala Point to Mana on the west side to preserve the access and quality of life in these areas. By removing invasive species from and restoring coastal areas, we can give back to that which gives so much to us: the bridge between land and sea.

**INDIGENOUS ALTERNATIVE:** Looking for a sprawling shrub that is adapted for coastal conditions? Try our native pohinahina! Pretty and practical, pohinahina has gorgeous purple flowers and helps to control erosion. Find out more from Rick Barboza's "In the Garden" article <http://starbulletin.com/2005/07/15/features/garden.html>