



News Release

Pacific Islands External Affairs Office

300 Ala Moana Blvd., Room 5-311 Box 50187, Honolulu, HI 96850
Phone: 808 792-9530 Fax: 808 792-9583

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Contact: Ken Foote (USFWS), 808 792 9535 or 282 9442
Deborah Ward (DLNR), 808 587-0320

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Environmental Assessment for Lehua Island Ecosystem Restoration Project Finalized

Ecological restoration of Lehua Island is one step closer today as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Hawai'i Department of Land and Natural Resources', Division of Forestry and Wildlife released the Final Supplemental Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Lehua Island Ecosystem Restoration Project and its associated Finding of No Significant Impact for proposed actions to protect and promote native Hawaiian species on Lehua. The USFWS and DLNR-DOFAW have determined that the project would have no significant negative environmental impact, but rather provide a net benefit to native species and their habitats on Lehua.

The project will protect and restore native populations of seabirds, plants, and other wildlife on Lehua by eradicating rats, an invasive species damaging the island's ecosystem. Rats are known to have eliminated many seabird species from islands around the world by eating bird eggs and preying on live birds. They also feed on native plants and insects, suppressing or eliminating populations of these species as well. Once the rats are removed, a plant restoration project will follow increasing habitat for native birds and insects.

Since the original environmental assessment was approved in 2005, several important modifications to the rat eradication operation have been determined to be more effective. Therefore, the USFWS and DLNR, as joint lead agencies, determined that the original 2005 EA should be supplemented to evaluate the impacts associated with these modifications. Modifications minimize and avoid adverse impacts to nontarget species such as birds and include changing the start time from mid-summer to mid-winter. The adjusted start time improves the effectiveness of bait distribution while minimizing impacts to seabirds since fewer are present at that time of year. The supplement found that proposed actions would have no significant negative impact on the resources. This project will positively impact the protection and promotion of native Hawaiian species on Lehua.

The National Marine Fisheries Service concurred that the modifications to the operation will not harm Hawaiian monk seals, whales, or sea turtles. The State Historic Preservation Division of the Hawai'i DLNR also concurred that the project will have no adverse effects on significant historic sites on Lehua Island, provided that certain mitigation measures are implemented. All mitigation measures will be completed prior to the rat eradication.

The USFWS and DLNR-DOFAW, working with The United States Department of Agriculture, USDA – APHIS – Wildlife Services, will eradicate introduced rats from Lehua Island via aerial application of the rodenticide diphacinone. Diphacinone has been shown to be an effective toxicant for rats in Hawai'i and throughout the world. Diphacinone is preferred because it is less toxic to nontarget species (such as birds) than other rodenticides.

Bait pellets will be evenly distributed on Lehua using an agricultural spreader suspended from a helicopter. The specially trained project manager and helicopter pilot will manage the application and track distribution of the bait to ensure even coverage. Since the early 1990s, 57 islands worldwide have been cleared of rats using a similar method of aerial bait distribution.

Follow up monitoring will be conducted to ensure that the project results in the successful removal of rats from the island and that aquatic and terrestrial life are not affected by the diphacinone. A similar operation on Mōkapu Island, located off the north shore of Molokaʻi was recently conducted, in which sampling of seawater, ʻopihi, and fish detected no diphacinone residues.

Lehua Island is uninhabited and located less than a mile north of Niʻihau and approximately 20 miles west of Kauaʻi. The 310-acre island is a State Seabird Sanctuary that provides habitat for at least 16 species of seabirds, as well as monk seals, native coastal plants and insects. The effort to eradicate predators is expected to result in an increased presence of threatened and endangered birds and give all native species a better chance at survival.

The Final Supplemental Environmental Assessment was prepared jointly by the USFWS and DLNR in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended, and Chapter 343, Hawaiʻi Revised Statutes. Copies may be obtained via the Service's website at <http://www.fws.gov/pacificislands/>, or by contacting the Pacific Islands Fish and Wildlife Office at 808-792-9400. A public notice was published on October 23 in the State of Hawaiʻi Office of Environmental Quality Control bulletin, *The Environmental Notice*.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov.

The Department of Land and Natural Resources' Division of Forestry & Wildlife (DOFAW) is the largest land management entity in the State of Hawaiʻi with direct responsibility for management of approximately 944,500 acres of state trust lands. These lands include the state's forest reserve system, natural area reserve system, plant and wildlife refuges and wilderness and game management areas.

The mission of Wildlife Services (WS) is to provide Federal leadership in managing problems caused by wildlife. WS recognizes that wildlife is an important public resource greatly valued by the American people. By its very nature, however, wildlife is a highly dynamic and mobile resource that can damage agricultural and industrial resources, pose risks to human health and safety, and affect other natural resources. The WS program carries out the Federal responsibility for helping to solve problems that occur when human activity and wildlife are in conflict with one another. (http://www.aphis.usda.gov/wildlife_damage).