



News Release

Pacific Islands External Affairs Office

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Samples Taken near Mōkapu Island Test Negative for Rodenticide Residues

Earlier this year a project to restore the native ecosystem on Mōkapu Island, located off the north coast of Molokaʻi, was initiated. The first step was to remove invasive nonnative rats from the island via the aerial application of the rodenticide diphacinone in February. Follow-up sampling to address public concerns about possible contamination of marine organisms has now been completed. No diphacinone residues were detected in the marine environment.

Diphacinone was chosen as the active ingredient because it is safer than other compounds previously used outside of Hawaiʻi. Samples of seawater, limpets (opihi), and fish were collected in nearshore areas around Mōkapu Island that may have been exposed to the rodenticide. Samples were collected by Molokaʻi fishermen and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 5 days after the final diphacinone application. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Wildlife Research Center in Ft. Collins, Colorado tested the samples and found no diphacinone in any of them.

Aerial application of the rodenticide was the only safe and practical method of deploying rodenticide to areas as steep as Mōkapu Island. Two applications were made to ensure the effectiveness of the rodenticide. These allowed for an even distribution of the bait pellets throughout the island and also ensured that the bait was eaten multiple times over an extended period. The aerial application was conducted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Hawaiʻi Department of Land and Natural Resources' Division of Forestry and Wildlife, and USDA-APHIS-Wildlife Services.

In addition, operational safeguards were built into the bait application process to minimize the risk of bait pellets entering the ocean. Safeguards included not applying bait during high winds or when significant rainfall is predicted, and using a calibrated GPS guided delivery system to avoid over-application of bait.

Prior to implementation of the project, public meetings were held on Molokaʻi and an Environmental Assessment was completed in order to seek input from the public. Before the first aerial broadcast, a Hawaiian blessing for the project was performed by Molokaʻi kūpuna.

The island will be monitored for rodents over the next two years, and if no rats are found by then, the eradication can be officially declared a success. Long-term monitoring of rare plants and seabirds will continue in order to measure the benefit to the native seabirds and plants. Monitoring on the island will only cover the ridges and other safely accessible areas because of the island's steep and dangerous slopes.

At least three seabird species - wedge-tailed shearwaters ('ua'u kani), red-tailed tropicbirds (koa'e 'ula), and white-tailed tropicbirds (koa'e kea) are known to nest on Mōkapu. The island also has 11 of the last 14 hoawa (*Pittosporum halophilum*) plants in the wild and a small population of loulou lelo (*Pritchardia hillebrandii*) palms, which are becoming increasingly rare. The top threat to these offshore island inhabitants is rats, which are known to eat seabirds and native plants.

Rats are known to have devastating effects on native ecosystems throughout the world. In Hawai'i that effect is magnified due to the archipelago's isolation and unique flora and fauna – many of which are found nowhere else in the world. Removing the rats, an invasive nonnative species, from Mōkapu Island will greatly benefit the island's native species.

The Mōkapu Island marine sampling results can be viewed online at <http://www.hawaii.gov/dlnr>. Inquiries concerning the project and sampling results can be directed to Chris Swenson, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at 808 792 9400.

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 Hawai'i 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)

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