

# News Release



Pacific Islands Fish and Wildlife Office  
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## **Service Releases Draft Economic Analysis of Critical Habitat Proposal For Three Hawai'i Island Species**

*Public information meeting and public hearing scheduled on Big Island*

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today released an analysis that estimates costs related to the proposed critical habitat for three species on the island of Hawai'i at \$35,000 between the years 2013 and 2022.

The draft economic analysis provides estimated costs of the foreseeable potential economic impacts of the proposed critical habitat designation for the three Big Island species over the next 10 years. This was determined to be the appropriate period for analysis because limited planning information is available for most activities to forecast activity levels for projects beyond a 10-year timeframe.

On October 17, 2012, the Service released its proposal to list 15 species as endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and to designate 18,766 acres of critical habitat for one of the proposed plant species – *Bidens micrantha* ssp. *ctenophylla* (ko'oko'olau) – and for two previously listed plant species – *Mezoneuron kawaiense* (uhiuhi) and *Isodendron pyriformium* (wahine noho kula) - that do not have designated critical habitat on the island of Hawai'i. Critical habitat is not determinable for the remaining 14 species proposed for listing.

In releasing the draft economic analysis, the Service is reopening the public comment period on the proposed listing of 15 Big Island species and the proposed critical habitat for three species. The Service will accept public comments until May 30, 2013.

The Service will hold a public informational meeting followed by a public hearing on May 15, 2013 at the West Hawai'i Civic Center - Council Chambers, 74-5044 Ane Keohokalole Highway, Kailua-Kona, Hawai'i 96740 (Tel. 808.323.4444). The informational meeting will be from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m.; the public hearing will be from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. The informational meeting is a chance for the public to ask questions and discuss the listing and critical habitat proposals and draft economic analysis with staff from the Service. The public hearing is solely for the purpose of taking official oral testimony but written comments also will be accepted. Both oral and written comments carry equal weight.

The initial comment period on the proposed listing and critical habitat closed December 17, 2012. The Service is reopening the comment period to allow all interested parties an opportunity to comment simultaneously on the proposed rule, the associated draft economic analysis, and the amended required determinations section. Comments previously submitted on this rulemaking do not need to be resubmitted, as they will be fully considered in preparation of the final rule.

The areas proposed as critical habitat include seven units totaling approximately 18,766 acres (7,597 hectares) on the island of Hawai‘i. All three species co-occur in the same lowland dry ecosystem and share many of the same physical or biological features (e.g., elevation, annual rainfall, substrate and associated native plant genera) as well as the same threats from development, fire and nonnative ungulates and plants. The proposed critical habitat designation includes both occupied and unoccupied habitat.

Approximately 55 percent of the area being proposed as critical habitat is already designated as critical habitat for 42 plants and the Blackburn’s sphinx moth. Of the total acreage identified, 64 percent is located on state lands, 2 percent on federal lands, less than 1 percent on county lands, and 34 percent on private lands.

In the proposed rule, the Service is considering excluding 4,099 acres (1,659 hectares) of privately-owned lands from critical habitat that have a voluntary conservation agreement, partners in watershed partnerships or dry forest working groups, conservation or watershed preserve designation, or similar conservation protection. These specific exclusions will be considered on an individual basis or in any combination thereof. The final decision on whether to exclude any area will be based on the best scientific data available at the time of the final designation, including information obtained during the comment periods and information about the economic impact of the designation.

When specifying an area as critical habitat, the Endangered Species Act requires the Service to consider economic and other relevant impacts of the designation. If the benefits of excluding an area outweigh the benefits of designating it, the Secretary may exclude an area from critical habitat, unless that would jeopardize the existence of a threatened or endangered species.

The draft economic analysis focuses on economic activities that are occurring or have the potential to occur within the proposed critical habitat area and are of primary concern with respect to potential adverse modification of critical habitat. The key concern is the potential for activities to result in ground disturbance within a critical habitat unit. Such activities include commercial, residential and industrial development, and transportation projects. Within these activity categories, the draft economic analysis focuses on those projects and activities that are considered reasonably likely to occur within the proposed critical habitat area. This includes projects or activities that are currently planned or proposed or that permitting agencies or land managers indicate are likely to occur.

Critical habitat is a term in the Endangered Species Act that identifies geographic areas containing features essential for the conservation of a threatened or endangered species, and which may require special management considerations or protection. Specifying the location of habitat essential for the conservation of the species helps federal agencies identify where to utilize their authorities to benefit the species as required by the Act. Designating critical habitat also helps focus the conservation efforts of other conservation partners, such as state and local governments, non-governmental organizations, and individuals. When the designation of critical habitat occurs near the time of listing it provides early conservation planning guidance to bridge the gap until the Service can complete more thorough recovery planning.

In addition to serving as a notification tool, the designation of critical habitat also provides significant regulatory protection for threatened and endangered species – the requirement that federal agencies consult with the Service to ensure actions they fund, authorize or carry out are not likely to destroy or adversely modify critical habitat. The designation of critical habitat ensures that the federal government considers the effects of its actions on protected species and avoids or modifies those actions that are likely to destroy or adversely modify critical habitat.

Designation of critical habitat does not affect land ownership or establish a refuge or preserve. Listed species and their habitat are protected by the Act whether or not they are in an area designated as critical habitat. In general, a critical habitat designation has no impact on private landowners taking actions on their land that do not require federal funding or permits.

The Endangered Species Act provides a critical safety net for America's native fish, wildlife and plants. This landmark conservation law has prevented the extinction of hundreds of imperiled species across the nation and promoted the recovery of many others. The health of threatened and endangered species is strongly linked to the health and well-being of people and communities. Millions of Americans depend on habitat that sustains imperiled species – for clean air and water, recreational opportunities and for their livelihoods.

Comments on the proposed listing, critical habitat and/or the draft economic analysis may be submitted to:

- *Federal eRulemaking Portal* at <http://www.regulations.gov> . Follow the instructions for submitting comments. Docket No. FWS–R1–ES–2012–0070 (listing) or Docket No. FWS–R1–ES–2013–0028 (critical habitat proposal, revisions, and associated draft economic analysis).
- Via U.S. mail or hand delivery to Public Comments Processing, Attn: FWS–R1–ES–2013–0028; Division of Policy and Directives Management; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, MS 2042–PDM, Arlington, VA 22203.

The deadline for submitting comments is May 30, 2013.

Copies of the proposed rule and the draft economic analysis may be downloaded from the Service's website at <http://www.fws.gov/pacificislands/>. For further information contact: Loyal Mehrhoff, Field Supervisor, Pacific Islands Fish and Wildlife Office, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 300 Ala Moana Boulevard, Room 3-122, Box 50088, Honolulu, Hawai'i 96850; telephone 808/792-9400 or fax 808/ 792-9581.

For a complete list of the proposed species visit: <http://www.fws.gov/pacificislands/>.

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