

News Release

Pacific Islands Fish and Wildlife Office
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Public Comment Period Reopened on Proposal to Designate Critical Habitat for Three Plant Species on Hawai'i Island *Second Public Informational Meeting Scheduled on Big Island*

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) announced today the reopening of the public comment period for the proposal to designate critical habitat for three Hawai'i Island plant species and on the draft economic analysis. The Service will also conduct a second informational meeting to discuss the critical habitat proposal and draft economic analysis, and to help clarify any additional questions the public may have.

On Oct. 17, 2012, the Service made available to the public a proposed rule to list 15 species as endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and to designate 18,766 acres of critical habitat for three Big Island plant species. One of the plant species – *Bidens micrantha* ssp. *ctenophylla* (ko'oko'olau) – is one of the 15 species proposed for listing; the other two – *Mezoneuron kavaense* (uhiuhi) and *Isodendron pyriform* (wahine noho kula) – are previously listed plant species that do not currently have designated critical habitat on the island of Hawai'i. An accompanying draft economic analysis provides an estimate of the potential economic impacts of the proposed critical habitat designations over the next 10 years. Critical habitat is not determinable for the remaining 14 species proposed for listing.

The initial comment period on the proposed listings and critical habitat designations closed on Dec. 17, 2012. On April 30, the comment period was reopened for 30 days, during which time a public meeting and hearing was held in Kailua Kona. The comment period is now being reopened for an additional 60 days on the three critical habitat designations and accompanying draft economic analysis to ensure that the public has an adequate opportunity to review and comment. The Service will accept comments until Sept. 3. Comments previously submitted on the proposed rule or draft economic analysis need not be resubmitted, as they will be fully considered in this rulemaking action.

The Service will hold a second public informational meeting from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. on Wednesday, Aug. 7, 2013, at the West Hawai'i Civic Center – Community Meeting Hale, Building G, 74-5044 Ane Keohokalole Highway, Kailua-Kona, Hawai'i 96740; telephone: (808) 323-4444. No oral testimony will be heard during this meeting.

The areas proposed as critical habitat include seven units totaling 18,766 acres (7,597 hectares) on the island of Hawai'i. The proposed critical habitat designation includes both occupied and unoccupied habitat, and a mixture of state federal, county and private lands.

Habitat destruction and modification caused by invasive, nonnative plants, feral pigs, sheep and goats, and agricultural and urban development is considered a threat. Other threats include

consumption of rare species by nonnative feral pigs, sheep and goats, and other introduced species such as rats and nonnative invertebrates. Native habitat is also threatened by the effects of climate change, which may intensify existing natural threats such as fire, hurricanes, landslides and flooding.

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, are partners in watershed partnerships or dry forest working groups, or have a conservation or watershed preserve designation or similar conservation protection. 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, after taking into consideration the economic impact and any other relevant impact of the designation.

The Service is accepting all comments on the proposed rule, however the *Federal Register* notice highlights specific information that the Service is seeking. Comments on the critical habitat 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–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.

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.

The ESA provides a critical safety net for fish, wildlife and plants and has prevented the extinction of hundreds of imperiled species, as well as promoting the recovery of many others. The Service is actively engaged with conservation partners and the public in the search for improved and innovative ways to conserve and recover imperiled species. To learn more about the Service’s Endangered Species program, visit: <http://www.fws.gov/angered/>.

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. Connect with our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/usfws, follow our tweets at www.twitter.com/usfwshq, watch our YouTube Channel at <http://www.youtube.com/usfws> and download photos from our Flickr page at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfwshq>

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