

INVASIVE SPECIES PROGRAMS RECOGNIZED BY SENATOR GABBARD

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Several projects partially funded by the Hawai'i Invasive Species Council were recognized for their efforts by Senator Mike Gabbard on April 4, 2012 in a presentation before the Hawaii State Senate. Senator Gabbard recognized the island-based Invasive Species Committees as well as HDOA exploratory entomologist Dr. Mohsen Ramadan for their dedication to detecting and controlling invasive species in Hawaii.



L to r: Rachel Neville (OISC), Teya Penniman (MISC), Lori Buchanan (MoMISC), Senator Gabbard, Keren Gundersen (KISC), Dr. Jan Schipper (BIISC), Dr. Mohsen Ramadan (HDOA)

Press Release from the Hawaii Invasive Species Council, April 4, 2012:

HONOLULU—The county-based Invasive Species Committees (ISCs) and a representative from the Hawaii Department of Agriculture's (HDOA) biological control program were honored today in a floor presentation by Senator Mike Gabbard. Each legislative session, State Senators have one opportunity to honor groups and individuals who have distinguished themselves and deserve special recognition.

Senator Gabbard selected these programs because Hawaii's ecosystems are in a crisis due to invasive species, and they are on the front lines of combating the threats. In recognition of these efforts, Senator Gabbard said, "Mahalo to the dedicated men and women of the Invasive Species Committees for their diligence in preventing, controlling, and eliminating the most threatening invasive plant and animal species to preserve our native biodiversity. They work hard to keep Hawaii naturally beautiful as it should be."

The Invasive Species Committees are projects of the Pacific Cooperative Studies Unit and the Research Corporation of the University of Hawaii. The ISC's are island-based partnerships on Kauai (KISC), Oahu (OISC), Maui (MISC), Molokai (MOMISC), and the Big Island (BIISC) that work with government agencies, non-profit organizations, and private businesses and landowners to protect each island from the most threatening pests with a proactive approach. Each ISC has a staff that includes a field crew who works across thousands of acres every year to rapidly respond to and control new invasive pests. The ISCs target species that have high potential to severely impact the economy, environment, agriculture, human health, and quality of life, such as fast-spreading miconia trees, noisy coqui frogs, and stinging little fire ants.

Senator Gabbard also honored Dr. Mohsen Ramadan of the Hawaii Department of Agriculture as an important member of the statewide network committed to addressing invasive species issues. "Dr. Ramadan is recognized internationally as one of the best exploratory entomologists because of the dedication and passion that he brings to his work in defense of our native species. But what makes him unique is his willingness to risk his life in remote and hostile locales all over the world to find biocontrol agents to eradicate or control invasive species," said Senator Gabbard.

HDOA's biological control program is a component of the Department's Plant Pest Control Branch. Biological control is an important tool to manage widespread pests that are beyond the capacity of field crews. Dr. Ramadan was responsible for finding the natural predator of the Erythrina gall wasp in its native range in Tanzania. The wasp arrived undetected on cargo in 2005 devastating Hawaii's native wiliwili trees as well as ornamental species of Erythrina used in landscaping and as agricultural windbreaks. Since the biocontrol agent found by Dr. Ramadan was successfully released in 2008, native wiliwili trees are making a comeback.

Funds from the Hawaii Invasive Species Council (HISC) help support the ISCs and HDOA's foreign explorations for biocontrol agents as part of the HISC's mission as an interagency collaboration to support the prevention, response and control, research, and public outreach efforts of invasive species programs across the state.

"We are extremely grateful for all the hard work and dedication of our island Invasive Species Committees," said William J. Aila, Jr., DLNR Chairperson. "Their on-the-ground quick action has prevented introduction or spread of many dangerous pests to our islands. Governor Abercrombie demonstrated his commitment to keeping invasive species out of Hawaii by making the restoration of inspection positions at Honolulu International Airport a priority in his first year as Governor. This is a battle that we must fight and win to protect our native ecosystems and the health and economic wellbeing of our islands," Aila said.

Big Island:

The Big Island Invasive Species Committee works to guard the Big Island from coqui frogs, mangrove, axis deer, and miconia. BIISC originally started at the Melastome Action Committee in 1996 with a focus on miconia. Since then, BIISC has transitioned to respond to more species of concern and more recently pulled their partners together to form a coalition to address the new threat of axis deer to Hawaii Island's environment and agriculture. BIISC has also completed a 3,000-mile island wide roadside weed survey that spanned almost four years. This information helps BIISC to prioritize target weeds for rapid response, which ensures resources are directed most effectively with an approach that prevents weeds from spreading beyond control.

In response to the recognition, Jan Schipper, Project Manager for BIISC, said, "We are honored by this recognition. They say it takes a community to raise a child. But it also takes every individual in the community to work together to stop the introduction and spread of weeds and pests to ensure that every child will have fresh food, clean water, and a livelihood when he or she grows up."

Maui:

The Maui Invasive Species Committee works to guard Maui from coqui frogs, pampas grass, veiled chameleons, and miconia. MISC was the first Invasive Species Committee to form in 1999. Many of MISC's original founders still participate today in meetings to share information and set priorities. The partnership brings together scientists, resource managers, foresters, botanists, wildlife biologists, and representatives from county, state, and federal agencies to contribute their time and expertise. MISC works island-wide with a Hana-based crew that focuses almost exclusively on miconia. Other MISC staff work out of their headquarters in upcountry Maui to tackle 20 different species of invasive plants and animals.

In response to the recognition, MISC Manager Teya Penniman said, "This is an incredible honor for all of the ISC's, and I believe reflects on the vision, work, commitment, support, intelligence, and persistence that all of our partners and members of the committee have brought to MISC. I am here representing the people who first came together in the 1990's with the vision that created the ISC's, those who have continued to offer support, and each one of the MISC staff who are truly the awesome hearts and backs of our efforts."

Molokai:

The Molokai Invasive Species Committee works to guard Molokai from albizia, pampas grass, rubbervine, and coqui frogs. Since its inception in 2000, MOMISC has tripled in size from a paid staff of one to three fulltime employees, all of who are local Molokai residents. One key to MOMISC's success is community support and involvement, as was demonstrated during a recent project to take on the only known stand of albizia on Molokai. Albizia is one of the fastest growing trees in the world, and it has become widely established on most of the main islands. MOMISC received help from the landowner, the kumu with genealogical ties to the area, partners, and the broader community to work on 850 trees that were up to 120 feet tall and covered 15 acres of land.

Oahu:

The Oahu Invasive Species Committee works to guard Oahu from coqui frogs, miconia, false kava and fireweed. Since it was first founded in 2002 by devoted volunteers, OISC has stopped the spread of the watershed-destroying miconia tree in an effort to protect enormous tracts of native forests across the Koolau and Waianae Ranges. OISC has also partnered with DOA, DLNR, and the Oahu Army Natural Resources Program to remove coqui frogs in Wahiawa.

In response to the recognition, OISC Operations Manager, Rachel Neville, said, "Oahu is densely populated and very urban, but it is the native forests at the summits of the Koolau and Waianae ranges that allow so many people to live here. They capture rain to provide water for Oahu farmers, residents and visitors; soak up the 24 million metric tons of carbon produced by Hawaii residents each year; and anchor soil to mountain, preventing erosion and mudslides. But those things only happen when the forest is healthy. The OISC staff works hard to ensure that Oahu forests remain healthy by systematically removing the highest threat invasive species. All of us at OISC view our work as a service we provide to Oahu citizens and we are honored to be recognized for it."

Kauai:

The Kauai Invasive Species Council works to guard Kauai from coqui frogs, miconia, little fire ants, and mongoose. Since KISC was started by passionate members of the Kauai community in 2002, it has grown from two to nine employees, which includes a field crew, an Outreach Specialist, a Planner/Analyst and other support staff.

In response to the recognition, KISC Manager, Keren Gundersen, said, "On behalf of KISC, I am so honored by this recognition. It reflects the sentiment that what we are protecting is worth protecting and that by preserving our natural resources, we preserve what is important to the people of Hawaii—our water, our agriculture, our culture, our unique flora and fauna, our way of life, and the beauty of these islands. I am privileged to work with an outstanding crew who really enjoy what they do. With their 'can do' attitude they are able to accomplish remarkable feats, making a difference in their community."

Watch a video of the Senate recognition ceremony: