



Oahu invaded by Devil Weed

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By Rick Daysog - email

HONOLULU (HawaiiNewsNow) - To combat a new species of invasive plants, conservationists are forging a unique partnership with motorcross riders and hikers.

The toxic plant, known as the devil weed, has taken hold in Kahuku and is spreading to Kahana Valley. It's found in areas near the Kahuku Motorcross riding area.

"We've engaged in an outreach and education of any motorcross individuals but we've also posted information on their websites and attended races," said Julia Parish, manager at the Oahu Invasive Species Committee.

"It just starts growing out of control."

The devil weed gets its name from its pitchfork leaf pattern and noxious odor that resembles turpentine. It's not only harmful to endemic plants and animals but is toxic to livestock and people.

"It can cause severe irritation to the skin. If anyone has gone to the mainland and come into contact with poison ivy or poison oak, they can have as severe a reaction," Parish said.

The problem is that its seeds are spread easily by wind, livestock and people. And because of the infestation's proximity to the Kahuku Motorcross riding area, it can be spread easily by bikers and hikers.

The infestation site is also within a mile of the James Campbell Natural Wildlife refuge as well as the Pupukea Forest preserve.

"If it was to spread into these regions it could impact our endemic wildlife species," said Parish.

But unlike other invasive species such as the strawberry guava and the coqui frog, Parish said the devil weed can be controlled -- if not eradicated -- from Hawaii's environment.

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