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‘Open house’ meetings scheduled to discuss strawberry guava threat, biocontrol management plan

Attendees will have opportunity to provide written comments for revised environmental assessment

HILO, Hawaii, April 14, 2009—A series of open house meetings hosted by the U.S. Forest Service will provide opportunities to learn about and discuss the threat strawberry guava poses to native Hawaiian forests as well as the proposed use of biological control, or biocontrol, to manage the species. These meetings are the latest step being taken by federal and state agencies to gather citizen input for an Environmental Assessment (EA) for biocontrol of the invasive tree.

Meetings will be held from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. and are scheduled for:

- Maui—on Monday, April 27, at the Maui Arts and Cultural Center in Kahului;
- Kauai—on Wednesday, April 29, at Chiefess Kamakahahei Middle School in Lihue;
- Oahu—on Thursday, April 30, at McCoy Pavilion at Ala Moana Park, Honolulu;
- Hawaii Island, Hilo—on Thursday, May 14, at the University of Hawaii at Hilo, Room UCB 127 (the glass room); and
- Hawaii Island, Kona—on Monday, May 18, at NELHA Gateway Center, Kailua-Kona (near the Kona airport).

The meetings will have an open house format and will include opportunities for attendees to provide written comments. Scientists from the U.S. Forest Service Pacific Southwest Research Station’s Institute of Pacific Islands Forestry (IPIF), the Hawaii Department of Agriculture, Hawaii Invasive Species Council, and other agencies will be in attendance.

Strawberry guava is a South American tree introduced in 1825 that has degraded vast areas of native Hawaiian forest. It has the potential to take over 90 percent of the state’s remaining forest ecosystems by forming dense thickets that crowd out native species, break up natural areas, and disrupt the flow of water to streams and aquifers. Manual and chemical control methods, such as removal by bulldozer and herbicides, have not been able to keep pace with its growth in Hawaii.

“Strawberry guava is one of the greatest threats to our dwindling native forests and the unique species that inhabit them, as well as our water resources and the traditional and contemporary uses and values these represent to the people of Hawaii,” said Deanna Spooner, Executive Director of the Hawaii Conservation Alliance, a partnership of state, federal, and private land management agencies that voted last year to support the biocontrol plan.

To protect remaining native forests from the ongoing spread of strawberry guava, state conservationists and agencies asked IPIF scientists to investigate biocontrol as a management strategy. This research began in 1988 and culminated last May, when IPIF scientists submitted a draft EA

proposing to release an insect that is a natural control agent of strawberry guava in Brazil. The insect slows the growth of the plant, while allowing it to continue to flower and fruit, and was safely tested on more than 80 native and agricultural plant species in Hawaii. It was found to survive only on strawberry guava.

When some citizens indicated concerns about the draft EA last May, the agencies involved decided to gather more input through county and civic meetings and additional scientific testing and review. The revised draft EA, which takes this additional feedback into account, is expected to be completed in late May 2009.

“Even though public meetings are not legally required as part of the EA process, we felt it was important to take time to respond to concerns, improve the document, and allow additional opportunities for comment,” said Tracy Johnson, a research entomologist with IPIF.

For more information about strawberry guava and the threat it poses to native Hawaiian forests, visit <http://www.fs.fed.us/psw/programs/ipif/strawberryguava/>. The Web site also describes the biocontrol management plan and features frequently asked questions and photo galleries.

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