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## Waiawi are water hogs

by Nancy Cook Lauer  
Stephens Honolulu Bureau

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### Strawberry guava-invaded forests evaporate more H2O than those that are strictly native

HONOLULU -- Native forests invaded by strawberry guava lose 27 percent more water to the atmosphere than pristine forests, a University of Hawaii researcher has found.

"This translates into a huge loss of water from our soils, streams and groundwater systems in areas where strawberry guava has invaded native forests," said UH geography professor Thomas Giambelluca in a July 22 public statement about his unpublished research. "Increased evapotranspiration can be directly equated with reduced water available for municipal water supply systems and irrigation."

The first-ever study has calculated water loss since early 2006 using state-of-the-art sensing equipment to measure energy, carbon and water exchanges at a native forest site and one invaded by strawberry guava, or waiawi.

Despite a growing pile of evidence that the invasive strawberry guava is detrimental to native forests, there is still strong resistance to using a last-ditch effort to control it, especially on the Big Island, scientists said Monday at the quarterly meeting of the Coordinating Group of Alien Pest Species, a public-private partnership addressing invasive species statewide.

The U.S. Forest Service has applied for a permit to release a Brazilian scale insect, *Tectococcus ovatus*, to control it, beginning with the O'laa Forest Reserve on the Big Island, then moving statewide. The insect has been tested at the Hawaii Volcanoes National Park quarantine facility for six years, and observations in Brazil have been ongoing since 1993.

Scientists say the aphid-like insect spreads slowly and will keep the guava from fruiting and spreading, not eliminate it.

But public opposition remains. The Big Island Kanaka Council voted to oppose the release of the insect, and a hearing last month in Hilo did little to calm fears.



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The U.S. Forest Service has applied for a permit to release a Brazilian scale insect, *Tectococcus ovatus*, to control waiawi, beginning with the O'laa Forest Reserve on the Big Island. - U.S. Forest Service

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"This has become a very contentious issue and it's been very difficult to try to keep ahead of some of these folks that are opposing, because they have been very successful spreading disinformation," said Christy Martin, public information officer for CGAPS. "This doesn't just affect us and our forests. It affects water for years to come."

Waiawi is supported by many of Portuguese ancestry who value the fruit to make jelly, hunters who burn the wood to smoke pigs and woodworkers who consider it a useful hardwood.

However, it is extremely invasive and detrimental to the native forests, scientists say. It crowds out native species, harbors fruit flies that cost agriculture millions in eradication efforts and creates muddy footprints that only the invasive feral pig could love, in the process interfering with the natural water recharge of the forest floor.

If scientist are looking at biological controls such as importing insects, it means the invasion has spread beyond other ways to control it.

"We've tried everything for years and years and years -- removing by hand, mechanical, chemical," said Julie Leialoha, Big Island Invasive Species Council manager.

Still, Leialoha says, the ultimate decision about what to do with strawberry guava is up to the public.

"We're not here to convince anyone," Leialoha said. "We just put out the facts and people make up their own minds."

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**N.Kohala Scum** wrote on **Jul 29, 2008 2:24 PM:**

" What the Trib needs to do is get good (not lousy) pics from the field on how widespread the problem is and what the Waiawi is doing to the forests. "

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**iokea** wrote on **Jul 29, 2008 12:36 PM:**

" I also don't understand using waiawi for food - they are very poor fruit, mostly seeds. I think it's mostly people who want something for nothing that use them as a food source. I've seen people out in the Acres who are too indolent to keep their property in good shape or get a job, living in squalor - they are the ones out picking waiawi instead of planting fruits that would better serve the purpose. Clear the land of waiawi and you would have lots of room to grow food, unless you're too lazy to do that. "

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**iokea** wrote on **Jul 29, 2008 12:30 PM:**

" Yes, robguz24, it is rational to control these invasives. But there is a long history of trouble when using one invasive to control another. I think more effort to destroy these trees by cutting and poisoning is needed first. If you keep cutting them back and never let them fruit, they can't spread. "

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**robguz24** wrote on **Jul 29, 2008 12:20 PM:**

" I don't see how any rational person can oppose trying to control this, miconia, or coqui. It is an extremely invasive species destroying what is left of our precious native forests. "

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