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We're Alarmed, But What Do We Do? Phase Two of the Silent Invasion Media Campaign

In the 1990s, two independent studies (TNC/NRDC 1992; U.S. OTA 1994) about Hawaii's invasive species programs found that Hawaii has the worst alien pest problem in the nation. The reports chronicled large gaps in Hawaii's invasive species prevention, detection, response and control programs, and concluded that gaps could be addressed through increased inter-and intra-agency communication, cooperation, and public outreach. The Coordinating Group on Alien Pest Species (CGAPS), a voluntary government/non-government partnership formed in 1995 to address these gaps. CGAPS works on statewide policy and funding, collaborative projects, and outreach to address invasive species issues, and has made some headway in the area of public outreach. Using snakes as an example, a 1996 statewide public awareness survey found that 66% of people "had heard of brown tree snakes". CGAPS launched its first media campaign in 1997 called "Silent Invasion", which featured "shock footage" television public service announcements and short topic specials about the damage that brown tree snakes have caused on Guam. The campaign was intended to scare the public into taking invasive species issues seriously. This campaign, along with opportunistic news media stories over the next seven years have resulted in an increase in awareness of brown tree snakes and other featured species. In 2004, a second public awareness survey found that 83% of people "had heard of brown tree snakes." The same survey found that 91% of people were "very likely" to report a snake if they saw one, but less than 5% knew that there was a Pest Hotline number. Phase two of the Silent Invasion media campaign works to address this and other needs by instituting a single toll-free hotline number for statewide use and advertising the new number in television public service announcements airing in 2006. Now that we have the public alarmed, let's tell them what they can do.

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