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STOP THE SILENT INVASION

COORDINATING GROUP ON ALIEN PEST SPECIES

**PRESS RELEASE**

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**Contact:** Christy Martin, CGAPS PIO, Cell: (808) 722-0995

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**Resource Managers Plan Listening Sessions on Strawberry Guava**

The USDA Forest Service plans a series of state-wide public information and listening sessions about the proposed release of an insect to slow the spread of strawberry guava, a non-native fruit tree that is taking over native Hawaiian forests. Listening sessions starting in September of this year will allow opportunity for the public to become familiar with the proposed biocontrol insect and to ask questions and to provide input prior to completion of a new draft Environmental Assessment (EA), expected no sooner than October.

Healthy native forests are critically important components of Hawaii's unique cultural heritage and ecological well-being. Unfortunately, our native forests are being invaded and replaced by highly competitive alien plants such as strawberry guava. For decades, natural resource managers have worked to control strawberry guava in small areas of native forest using manual and chemical methods. However, because of its prolific seed production, dense growth, and lack of natural enemies in Hawaii, strawberry guava thickets are replacing native Hawaiian forests on more than 100,000 acres of forest land across the state, far too much to control with existing methods. Areas of heavy infestation become biological deserts with few native ohia or koa and few native birds.

*Tectococcus ovatus* is a scale insect that naturally occurs with strawberry guava in Brazil, where both are native. In Brazil, these and other natural enemies keep the strawberry guava population growth low. *Tectococcus* larvae feed and develop on growing leaves of strawberry guava, inducing the plant to form a gall around them. The gall production means less energy available for fruit production and growth, resulting in slower growth and fewer seeds, but the trees would continue to produce new leaves and some fruit. Introduction of this insect to Hawaii is intended to reduce the invasiveness of strawberry guava here.

"The most common concerns are that people don't want the strawberry guava killed or other plants affected," said biocontrol researcher Tracy Johnson of the U.S. Forest Service. "I try to talk to everyone who calls. I explain that the biology of these insects makes them so dependant on strawberry guava as a host that they cannot live without it. So the insects are highly specific, they do not kill strawberry guava, and we have 15 years of tests showing the insects will not move to other Hawaiian plants. *Tectococcus* would reduce the growth and reproduction of strawberry guava, which would help prevent further destruction of native forests, and allow slower growing native plants like ohia and koa a chance to compete."

Revision of the draft EA will include more attention to cultural concerns. Public comments – whether written or spoken - will be encouraged and addressed in the revised draft EA. This pre-EA consultation will be done via public information and listening sessions in multiple locations on each island starting in September. The schedule will be announced in local papers and online at www.hawaiiinvasivespecies.org or contact Tracy Johnson:

USDA Forest Service
Institute of Pacific Islands Forestry
60 Nowelo Street
Hilo, Hawaii 96720
Tel: 808-967-7122

The state EA process was triggered by the Forest Service's proposal to release the biocontrol insect on forest lands managed by the Hawaii Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR). Following submission of the draft EA to the Hawaii Office of Environmental Quality Control (OEQC), the public will have 30 days to comment, after which the DLNR will make a determination either to allow the biocontrol release to proceed or to require the Forest Service to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement.

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*Christy Martin is the Public Information Officer for the statewide Coordinating Group on Alien Pest Species (CGAPS), a public-private partnership working to protect Hawaii from invasive species.*