

HAWAII'S ENVIRONMENT

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Kaua'i THA
infected
with 'kiawe
from hell'

A very long-thorned form of kiawe is spreading on the west side of Kaua'i, and landowners are being urged to eradicate it before it gets worse.

The plant, *Prosopis juliflora*, first appeared in Hawai'i in 1978 at Sand Island on O'ahu. It appeared several years ago along the sandy coastline at Māna on Kaua'i. It's not clear whether seeds washed ashore from the O'ahu infestation, or whether the plant was inadvertently imported by humans.

Its thorns, some as long as two inches, are the problem. They are sturdy, and can puncture automobile tires, as well as slippers and shoes.

Surfers and fishermen who drive down sandy roads to the beach refer to the plant as "the kiawe from hell."

Botanist Winona Char found the plants established along the beach during a recent botanical survey at Kapalawai, the Robinson family home near Pākalā.

The plants there were restricted to the coast, and apparently had grown from seeds washed down the coastline from trees at the nearby Pacific Missile Range Facility.

Char said she also performed a botanical survey for the missile range, and found what she assumes is the mother plant for the West Kaua'i infestation.

"I found a ~~huge~~ plant, about 25 feet tall and wide," she said.

Char said she has recommended to the missile range that it eradicate the long-thorned kiawe. In recent testimony before the state Land Use Commission on a proposed developed at Kapalawai, she also recommended the plants be eradicated.

Kaua'i attorney Laurel Loo, at the same Land Use Commission hearing, said that during a field trip to the Kapalawai site, kiawe thorns pierced her sneakers.

One serious concern: The long-thorned kiawe readily crosses with the traditional kiawe found in Hawai'i, creating a new strain of trees with long thorns.

The first traditional kiawe, *Prosopis pallida*, was brought to the Islands in 1828, and planted at the old Catholic Mission grounds on Fort Street. While kiawe, also known as algaroba or mesquite, is from the Americas, its seed came by way of the royal gardens in Paris.

The offspring of that Fort Street tree sired all the subsequent kiawe forests on the dry leeward sides of the Islands. The tree does well in dry areas, and kiawe seed pods have been used for cattle feed.

Thorn length isn't the only difference between the long-thorned and standard kiawe. Leaflets on the long-thorned variety are considerably larger than those found on the standard kiawe, which has small, feathery leaflets.

Char said the long-thorned variety also has a tendency to extend long, narrow, thorned branches out along the ground, where they are easily stepped on or driven upon.