

STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES
Division of Forestry and Wildlife
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

July 11, 2025

Chairperson and Members
Board of Land and Natural Resources
State of Hawai'i
Honolulu, Hawai'i

SUBJECT: REQUEST FOR AUTHORIZATION TO TEMPORARILY CLOSE A PORTION OF THE HAU'ULA FOREST RESERVE, INCLUDING HUNTING UNIT C AND A SECTION OF THE MA'AKUA RIDGE-PAPALI TRAIL, TO CONTAIN AND ERADICATE LITTLE FIRE ANTS (WASMANNIA AUROPUNCTATA)

BACKGROUND:

In early 2025, the Division of Forestry and Wildlife (DOFAW) confirmed the presence of Little Fire Ants (LFA) in a 31-acre section of the Hau'ula Forest Reserve on O'ahu, marking the first detection of this species in a Forest Reserve on the island. The infested area includes part of the Ma'akua Ridge-Papali Trail and Hunting Unit C. It is bounded by Papali Gulch (west), Punaiki Gulch (east), the summit of the ridge above the trail (south), and the Forest Reserve boundary (north).

LFA are one of Hawai'i's most damaging invasive species. They deliver painful stings, can cause severe allergic reactions, and are known to blind pets such as cats and dogs. Ecologically, they displace native ant species, attack ground-nesting birds, and disrupt forest ecosystems. Their presence in recreational or hunting areas poses a risk to public safety and increases the likelihood of further spread.

As an emergency measure, DOFAW closed the area on February 28, 2025, for 90 days under HAR §13-104-7.5:

§13-104-7.5 Closing of areas. (a) The board, or its chairperson, may close or restrict the public use of all or any portion of a forest reserve in the event of an emergency or when deemed necessary for:

- (1) The protection of the biological, geological, or cultural resources of the area;
- (2) Health, safety, or welfare reasons;
- (3) The protection of property; or
- (4) Management activities, by the posting of appropriate signs indicating the duration, extent, and scope of closure.

(b) The chairperson is authorized to effect a given closure or restriction under subsection (a) for a period of not more than ninety days. The board is authorized to effect a closure or restriction for any period as deemed necessary to accommodate the condition or conditions indicated under subsection (a).

Signs were posted at all access points per requirements.

DISCUSSION:

DOFAW is coordinating an emergency response with the Hau'ula Community, Hawai'i Ant Lab, O'ahu Invasive Species Committee (OISC), O'ahu Army Natural Resources Program (OANRP), and the Hawai'i Department of Agriculture (HDOA). Together, they have surveyed the infested area and surrounding lands and are preparing for a 12–18 month treatment period using EPA-approved ant toxicants suitable for forest and residential areas.

Key Progress to Date

1. The infested area in the Forest Reserve was fully mapped in April 2025.
2. Multiple community outreach events have occurred, including meetings with local organizations and landowners.
3. DOFAW has scoped treatment areas and assessed aerial application options (drones/helicopters).
4. A special local needs license for pesticide use near gulches is being pursued.
5. Preparations are underway to begin treatment, including scheduling flight time and securing materials.
6. Drone-based treatments are planned for July 2025 and helicopter treatments in September 2025.
7. The treatment plan includes eight application cycles. If successful, the area will enter a five-year monitoring phase beginning in September 2026.

To ensure the safety and success of treatment efforts, DOFAW requests authorization to close the infested 31-acre portion of the Hau'ula Forest Reserve for 14 months, starting July 11, 2025. The closure will enable the safe and uninterrupted application of toxicants and reduce the risk of spreading ants via people, pets, or plant materials.

HAR §§13-104-7.5 allows temporary public safety and natural resource protection closures. Given the severity of the infestation and the complexity of treatment operations, closure is necessary and justified.

SUSPENSION OF FOREST PRODUCT PERMITS:

To minimize the risk of spreading LFA through plant materials, DOFAW will suspend forest product collection permits within the closed area for the closure duration.

USE OF TOXICANTS:

Eradicating little fire ants within the forest reserve will require the use of registered toxicants. Treatments will follow best management practices and product label guidelines, and will be supervised by the Hawai'i Ant Lab and the HDOA. Products will be selected to minimize harm to non-target species, per State Integrated Pest Management standards.

CHAPTER 343 – ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT:

This is a temporary emergency response to an invasive species threat. It involves no land use changes or permanent alterations to state land and is exempt from Chapter 343, HRS.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Board:

1. Approve a 14-month closure of the 31-acre portion of the Hau'ula Forest Reserve, including Hunting Unit C and part of the Ma'akua Ridge-Papali Trail, starting July 11, 2025, to control and eradicate the little fire ant infestation.
2. Delegate authority to the DOFAW Administrator to determine reopening based on treatment success and monitoring results.

Respectfully Submitted,



David G. Smith, Administrator

APPROVED FOR SUBMITTAL:

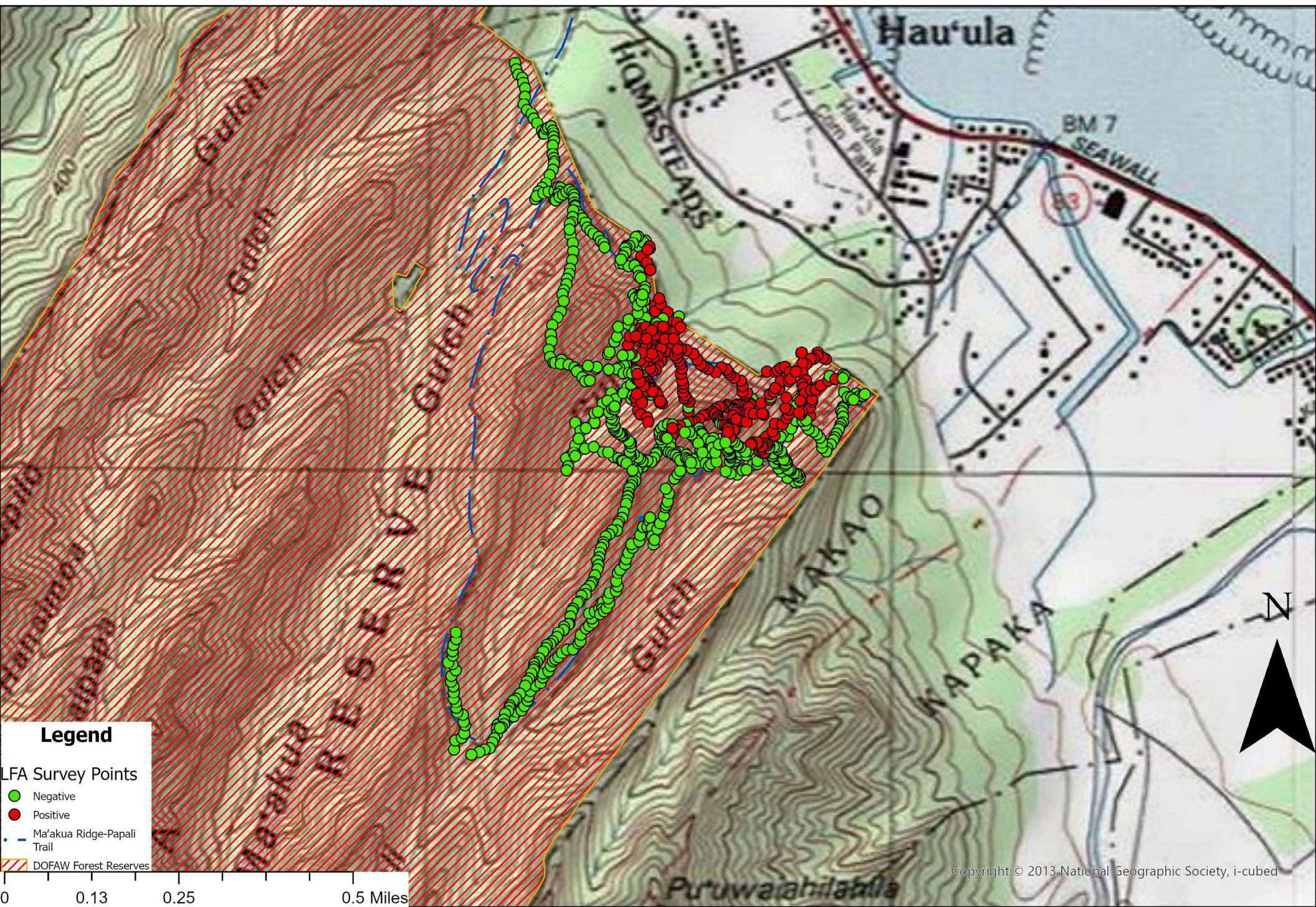


DAWN N.S. CHANG, Chairperson

Attachments: Map 1 and Map 2

Little Fire Ant Infestation Map in Forest Reserves

This map only presents the survey results in the Forest Reserve



Hau'ula Forest Reserve Closure Area

31 Acre Little Fire Ant Infestation

