



Monthly News & Updates

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PMKCA Vice President Ruth Bennett

Vice President's Message

Rapid 'Ohi'a Death – a Homeowner's Experience, Part 2

In the August PMKCA newsletter, I wrote about my experience with dying 'Ohi'a trees on my property in

When it was safe for me to investigate the tree close up, the team showed me the tell-tale signs of the fungus' attack on the stricken tree. In the cross-cut sections of the trunk and limbs, there were black marks laid through the living cambium layer, between the outer bark and the inner structure of the tree, as if someone had taken a black marker and drawn short lines towards the center of the log, marking off thin pie slices. The tree's ability to take up water and nutrients from its roots had been effectively strangled.

Throughout that day and the following day, the team proceeded around my pasture, felling each of the five infected trees and reducing them to low piles of logs and branches. The weather cooperated with a persistent drizzle and low winds, weighing down the dust, sawdust and spores released by the cutting.

At the end of the second day, I

Pa'auilo Mauka, and the assistance I received from the Big Island Invasive Species Committee (www.BIISC.org) in testing for Rapid 'Ohi'a Death (ROD). To briefly recap, my trees had been damaged by my goats eating the bark. I wrapped the trunks in chicken wire, but the trees were obviously in trouble. The BIISC folks took samples for testing, but the results were not available at the time my article was published. Here's what happened next:

About a week after the samples from my dying trees were taken, I received a call from Bill Buckley of BIISC. Yes – my trees WERE infected with the more aggressive strain of fungus (*Ceratocystis lukuohia*, “destroyer of 'Ohi'a”).

But what next? My feelings were so complex – shame for having contributed to the loss of my trees, a sense of responsibility to my neighbors and their 'ohi'a populations, and a strong desire to do the right thing, immediately and into the future.

Bill offered to make a space in the team's schedule and send a crew to take down the trees the very next day. An infected tree standing in the path of winds distributes spores to neighboring trees which might be vulnerable. Bringing down the infected trees and laying them low to the ground was the next critical step.

This is the story of the team's

took this photo of the team – from left to right, Jordan, Bryson, Kristen and Shannon. What great folks they are! Passionate about their work, skilled and knowledgeable, they were always willing to answer a question or gently give a piece of advice.



And what advice would the BIISC team like me to pass on to you?

First of all, LOVE YOUR 'OHI'A TREES! They are the most common tree endemic to our islands and they are certainly under serious threat.

Treat your trees with reverence. Don't knowingly damage them by cutting into them with weed whackers and saws. Protect them from the damaging habit of many pasture animals – like my goats.

If you are in an area where ROD is present, take precautions not to spread the disease by your actions – clean your clothes, shoes and tools

activities in felling my trees, the growing knowledge that informs their actions, and the lessons I learned from them as I “tagged along”.

Early on an overcast Tuesday morning, July 30, the team arrived. I knew some of the members from the testing event a week or so before; others were introduced to me – and as before, all the team members were friendly, polite, non-judgmental and obviously prepared for the work ahead of them. They were dressed in protective gear – to protect themselves as they felled the trees, and to minimize the threat of carrying the spores elsewhere.



After assessing the first tree (to avoid crushing a nearby shelter), they brought the tree down carefully and then cut the trunk, limbs and branches until the resulting pile was no more than 4 feet high. They

with an alcohol solution (keep it in a handy spray bottle), wash your vehicle’s tires and undercarriage, and don’t move infected wood to other locations.

If you have an ‘ohi’a with dying foliage, contact BIISC for advice and assistance. They will provide a diagnosis and point you to others who can help. They advise that they don’t always cut down every infected tree they encounter, but make their decision based on a broader management strategy for areas that are still mostly unaffected. Our area is considered to have a high priority.

Finally, support the groups in your area who are making an effort to control the spread of Rapid ‘Ohi’a Death and other invasive species. BIISC comes immediately to my mind, and there are other organizations on the Big Island who are playing a role in combating the disease.

If you live in the Pa’auilo Mauka and Kalopa areas, our PMKCA is forming an Invasive Species Committee to help deal with ROD and other invasives which are posing a threat to our health, our agriculture and the environment we share. If you would like to be a part of that committee, contact me, Ruth, through the PMKCA website.

[Next PMKCA Meetings](#)

explained that by reducing the tree's height and consolidating the resulting pile, they were minimizing the risk of wind-borne spread of spores. In some cases, the team recommends covering the pile with a tarp for a period of time. (There is a study in progress to determine the length of time that a felled ROD tree would remain infectious.)



Our next meeting will be a Board of Directors meeting on Thursday, October 10th at the [Hawaiian Vanilla Factory Co., 43-2007 Pa'auilo Mauka Road](#). All members are welcome to attend any of our quarterly Board meetings. At the Oct. 10 meeting, we will be introducing and discussing our new Invasive Species Committee and we especially welcome any members who might have an interest in the committee.

After that, our annual General Membership meeting will be held at Pa'auilo School in January, 2020 exact date to be determined. All PMKCA members and their guests are encouraged to attend.



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