HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
THIRTY-THIRD LEGISLATURE, 2025
STATE OF HAWAII

H.B. NO. 643 H.D. 2

A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO THE COCONUT RHINOCEROS BEETLE PROGRAM.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF HAWAII:

SECTION 1. The legislature finds that *Oryctes rhinoceros*, or the coconut rhinoceros beetle, can have devastating impacts on palm species that are foundational to the State's agricultural economy, cultural heritage, and ecosystems. Native to Southeast Asia, adult coconut rhinoceros beetles feed on emerging palm fronds, causing damage that can often be severe enough to kill the plant. The coconut rhinoceros beetle was first detected in the State in 2013 and is now established on Oahu, with smaller infestations on the windward side of Kauai, Waikoloa village on Hawaii island, and throughout the State.

The legislature further finds that the coconut rhinoceros beetle response program is a coordinated partnership among the university of Hawaii, United States Department of Agriculture, Hawaii department of agriculture, and other key organizations. At the university of Hawaii at Manoa lab, the program investigates new control methods and best practices, and a data team analyzes information from traps, mulch surveys, and tree

damage. An outreach team also provides information to the public and professionals while supporting community response efforts. While the expertise and methodology developed were not available at the start of the infestation on Oahu, they can now be deployed to prevent infestations on islands that are not yet infested. For infested areas, the program currently educates arborists and tree trimmers to protect trees with contact pesticides.

Additionally, the program is working on a long-term solution through biocontrol, which has been found to be effective in other parts of the world. The program is also working on permitting to bring in agents and hopes to host range studies in early 2026. Researchers have a rearing colony of coconut rhinoceros beetles at the university and need to test whether the viral strains that kill the beetles affect any native species. Once an appropriate strain is identified, it could be released on infected beetles to spread and suppress the population in the wild.

The legislature also finds that emergency response funding from the United States Department of Agriculture is ending, as it is no longer considered an emergency after more than ten

years. Stable year-to-year funding to the university of Hawaii to support key positions within the core coconut rhinoceros beetle response program would assist in leveraging additional federal funds.

The legislature declares that the management of coconut rhinoceros beetles is a matter of statewide concern.

The purpose of this Act is to:

(1) Establish short-term management initiatives for the coconut rhinoceros beetle response program; and

(2) Appropriate funds to support the coconut rhinoceros beetle response program's activities and positions.

SECTION 2. In its coconut rhinoceros beetle response, the university of Hawaii shall incorporate the following short-term management initiatives:

(1) Engagement with tree trimmers, arborists, and the landscaping industry to educate them on the current best management practices and combat the misinformation circulating about coconut rhinoceros beetle treatment options; provided that annual workshops shall be held on each island; provided

further that a list of companies that receive the training shall be posted online for use by consumers;

(2) Subsidizing canopy treatments for residential palm owners;

(3) Extending services by the coconut rhinoceros beetle response program to Hawaii island and the islands of Maui, Molokai, Kauai, and Lanai when coconut rhinoceros beetles are detected;

(4) Performing canine inspections, in coordination with the department of agriculture, on high-risk cargo moving between islands; and

(5) Conducting research with an emphasis on biocontrol.

SECTION 3. Applications for grants subsidizing canopy treatment for residential palm owners pursuant to section 2(2) of this Act shall be made to the university of Hawaii. At a minimum, the applicant shall:

(1) Be licensed or accredited, in accordance with federal, state, or county statutes, rules, or ordinances, to conduct the activities or provide the services for which a grant is awarded;

(2) Provide a detailed plan outlining the scope, objectives, and projected impact of the project or projects and a clear breakdown of how grant funds will be utilized;

(3) Agree to use state funds exclusively for canopy treatment;

(4) Indicate capability to properly use the grant for canopy treatment;

(5) Comply with all applicable federal and state laws prohibiting discrimination against any person on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, creed, sex, age, sexual orientation, disability, or any other characteristic protected under applicable federal or state law;

(6) Agree not to use state funds for purposes of entertainment or perquisites;

(7) Comply with other requirements as the university of Hawaii may prescribe;

(8) Comply with all applicable federal, state, and county statutes, rules, and ordinances;

(9) Agree to indemnify and save harmless the State and its officers, agents, and employees from and against any and all claims arising out of or resulting from activities carried out or projects undertaken with funds provided hereunder and procure sufficient insurance to provide this indemnification if requested to do so by the university of Hawaii; and

(10) Agree to make available to the university of Hawaii all records the applicant may have relating to the grant, to allow state agencies to monitor the applicant's compliance with this section.

SECTION 4. There is appropriated out of the general revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of $ or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2025-2026 and the same sum or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2026-2027 to be allocated as follows:

(1) $ for training tree trimmers, arborists, and the landscaping industry on the current best management practices about coconut rhinoceros beetles;

(2) $ for subsidizing canopy treatments for residential palm owners;

(3) $ for extending deployment of coconut rhinoceros beetle response teams to Hawaii island and the islands of Maui, Molokai, Kauai, and Lanai when coconut rhinoceros beetles are detected;

(4) $ to perform canine inspections, in coordination with the department of agriculture, for coconut rhinoceros beetles for high-risk cargo moving between islands;

(5) $ for three drones for Hawaii island and the islands of Maui and Kauai; and

(6) $ for full-time equivalent (FTE) permanent positions for biocontrol research, including technician and graduate student positions.

The sums appropriated shall be expended by the university of Hawaii for the purposes of this Act.

SECTION 5. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 3000.

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Report Title:
Coconut Rhinoceros Beetle; Prevention; University of Hawaii; Appropriation

Description:
Establishes short-term management initiatives for the coconut rhinoceros beetle response program. Appropriates funds for activities and positions related to coconut rhinoceros beetle infestation control. Effective 7/1/3000. (HD2)

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