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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

[Docket No. 03-034-2]

Ivy Gourd; Availability of an Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact

AGENCY: Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice.

SUMMARY: We are advising the public that an environmental assessment and finding of no significant impact have been prepared by the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service relative to a proposed field release of a nonindigenous leaf-mining weevil, *Acythopeus cocciniae*, into Guam and Saipan for the biological control of ivy gourd (*Coccinia grandis*). The environmental assessment documents our review and analysis of environmental impacts associated with widespread release of this agent. Based on its finding of no significant impact, the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service has determined that an environmental impact statement need not be prepared.

ADDRESSES: Copies of the environmental assessment and finding of no significant impact are available for public inspection in our reading room. The reading room is located in room 1141 of the USDA South Building, 14th Street and Independence Avenue, SW., Washington, DC. Normal reading room hours are 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, except holidays. To be sure someone is there to help you, please call (202) 690-2817 before coming.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Dr. Tracy A. Horner, Ecologist, Environmental Services, PPD, APHIS, 4700 River Road Unit 149, Riverdale, MD 20737-1237; (301) 734-5213.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

The Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) is considering several applications for permits to release the nonindigenous leaf-mining weevil *Acythopeus cocciniae* in order to reduce the severity and extent of ivy gourd (*Coccinia grandis*) infestations in Guam and Saipan.

Ivy gourd is native to Africa, Asia, Fiji, and northern Australia. This invasive weed is a rapidly growing, climbing or trailing vine that forms thick mats, overgrowing trees and other vegetation, walls, fences, and utility poles. Ivy gourd also serves as a host for numerous pests of cucurbitaceous crops, including black leaf-footed bug (*Leptoglossus australis*), leafminers (*Liriomyza* spp.), melon aphid (*Aphis gossypii*), melon fly (*Bactrocera cucurbitae*), pumpkin caterpillar (*Diaphania indica*), red pumpkin beetle (*Aulacophora foveicollis*), and whiteflies (*Bemisia* spp.).

Ivy gourd has been detected in the United States in Guam, Hawaii, and Saipan. In July 1999, we prepared an environmental assessment (EA) that examined the potential release of *A. cocciniae* and another weevil of the same genus, *A. burkhardtorum*, into the environment for use as biological control agents to reduce the severity and extent of ivy gourd infestations in the State of Hawaii. APHIS has subsequently received permit applications for additional releases of *A. cocciniae* beyond the area considered in the 1999 EA. The applicants propose to release *A. cocciniae* in Guam and Saipan to reduce the severity and extent of ivy gourd infestation on those islands.

A. cocciniae is native to Africa. Adults live up to 200 days and feed on the leaves of the ivy gourd, creating numerous holes in the lamina. Eggs are laid singly by insertion into the lamina of the leaves. The eggs hatch in about 8 days, and the larvae mine the leaves for 9 to 10 days thereafter. Pupation takes place within the mine and lasts for 15 days. Adult feeding and larval mining can cause drying of the leaves and eventual defoliation.

On April 8, 2003, we published in the **Federal Register** (68 FR 17007-17008, Docket No. 03-034-1) a notice in which we announced the availability, for

public review and comment, of an EA that examined the potential environmental impacts associated with the proposed release of *A. cocciniae* in Guam and Saipan for the biological control of ivy gourd.

We solicited comments on the EA for 30 days ending on May 8, 2003. We received one comment by that date, from a State agricultural agency. The commenter supported the proposed action.

In this document, we are advising the public of APHIS' record of decision and finding of no significant impact (FONSI) regarding the release of the nonindigenous leaf-mining weevil *A. cocciniae* into Guam and Saipan for the biological control of ivy gourd.

The EA and FONSI may be viewed on the Internet at <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/ppq/> by following the link for "Document/Forms Retrieval System" then clicking on the triangle beside "6—Permits—Environmental Assessments," and selecting document number 0034. You may request paper copies of the EA and FONSI by calling or writing to the person listed under **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT**. Please refer to the title of the EA when requesting copies. The EA and FONSI are also available for review in our reading room (information on the location and hours of the reading room is listed under the heading **ADDRESSES** at the beginning of this notice).

The EA and FONSI have been prepared in accordance with: (1) The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), as amended (42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.*), (2) regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality for implementing the procedural provisions of NEPA (40 CFR parts 1500-1508), (3) USDA regulations implementing NEPA (7 CFR part 1), and (4) APHIS' NEPA Implementing Procedures (7 CFR part 372).

Done in Washington, DC, this 23rd day of June, 2003.

Peter Fernandez,

Acting Administrator, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.

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