

Program at botanical garden might allow feral pig hunts

QUESTION: Were local pig hunters ever allowed to help trap feral pigs at Hoomaluhia Botanical Garden?

ANSWER: The idea for the city to save money by allowing local pig hunters to help cull feral pigs at the lush garden in Kaneohe hasn't been finalized.

Since January 2014, the city Department of Parks and Recreation has been developing a Memorandum of Understanding that would allow local pig hunters to help control the feral pig population at Hoomaluhia Botanical Garden for free, after the city's contract with the U.S. Department of Agriculture was allowed to expire in the fall of 2013. The wild boars have uprooted native plants in the 400-acre park and pose as a potential threat to visitors and staff.

Deputy Director Jeanne Ishikawa provided the latest updates on the agreement during an informational briefing before the City Council's Parks, Community and Customer Services Committee on March 2. Two separate groups, both affiliated with the Oahu Pig Hunters Association, have come forward wanting to participate in a six-month pilot project.

However, neither organization has submitted a completed permit application. Ishikawa said the sole source procurement program could begin soon — anywhere from two to four weeks — after all the paperwork has been approved.

Although the city's new plan will not cost taxpayers a dime, it could be pricey for the volunteer pig trappers.

Mitchell Tynanes, a vice president of the Oahu Pig Hunters Association, told Council members he created "Boars No More LLC" specifically for this pilot project. He said the liability insurance alone costs nearly \$2,000. Related expenses, including

bait and materials for boar traps — ranging from \$300 to \$800 — will also be paid for out of volunteers' pockets.

Ishikawa says there is a \$1 million liability/certificate of insurance that is a standard city requirement.

"It's never been waived," Ishikawa said. "We had to be fair and treat it equitably like every other organization."

Some committee members were surprised to hear that the volunteers would be operating at a deficit to provide their services.

"It does seem a little unfair to have an organization assume additional cost for the purpose of saving the city money," Councilwoman Carol Fukunaga said at the briefing, "when in fact if they didn't do it, the city would have to otherwise pay a much higher amount to have that service."

Ishikawa stressed that this is the first project of its kind, and after 180 days it will be evaluated to see if it's fit to become a regular program.

"We've never done this before and we want to do it legally and safely for everyone," Ishikawa said.

Although the current memorandum is modeled after the city's previous contract with the USDA, the department did not want to disclose the guidelines for proper pig removal — as stated in the MOU — until the agreement is finalized.

Despite the fact that volunteers may be spending their own money to provide the service to the city, Tynanes said he and other club members want to take part in the pilot project as a way help out the community.

"The faster we get in there, the faster we can help control the problem that's persisting out there at Hoomaluhia," Tynanes said. "Got to remember these are feral animals that reproduce every six months."

This update was written by Deborah Manog. Suggest a topic for "Whatever Happened To ..." by writing Honolulu Star-Advertiser, 500 Ala Moana Blvd., Suite 7-210, Honolulu 96813, call 529-4747; or email cityeditors@staradvertiser.com.