Fireweed (*Senecio madagascariensis*)

**Scientific name & Code**  
*Senecio madagascariensis* Poir., SEMA15

**Synonyms**  
none

**Family:**  
Asteraceae – Aster Family

**Duration/Growth Habit:**  
Annual/Biennial Forb

**Common names:**  
English – Madagascar ragwort, fireweed, Madagascar fireweed, variable groundsel

**Origin:**  
South Africa

**Description:**  
An erect hairless forb 10-70 cm high. Stems erect, slender, 10-70 arising from the crown, 10-50 cm high, branching above. Leaves bright green, alternate, variable shape (may be lobed or serrate), narrow and fleshy, 2-6 cm long, broader leaf bases clasped around the stem. Flowers bright yellow with 13 ray flowers oblong to obovate, 10 mm long and numerous tubular disc flowers grouped into heads of 15-20 mm diameter, each with a green involucres of 20-21 bracts. Seeds (achenes) brownish, cylindrical, 1.5-3 mm long covered with lines of short hairs crowned by a pappus of silky hairs.

**Propagation:**  
Seed us spread by wind, birds, animals, humans, and transfer of cinder or soil. Spreads locally by rooting from nodes.

**Distribution:**  
Identified on Hawaii (Hawai‘i, Kaho‘olawe, Kaua‘i, Lana‘i, Maui, O‘ahu)

**Habitat/Ecology:**  
Grows on subhumid to humid tropical woodlands, pastures, roadsides, and disturbed sites on a wide range of soils. Spreads rapidly and readily colonizes burnt-out areas.

**Environmental impact:**  
Toxic to cattle and horses. Displaces grasses and retains toxins even after drying. Can cause spontaneous combustion in alfalfa hay.

**Management:**  
Physical – Resting pastures can reduce infestations. Hand-pulling may be ineffective due to rooting capability of nodes. Can be killed by fire but recruits abundantly in burnt areas after rain.

Chemical – Very susceptible to 2,4-D, dicamba, MCPA, metsulfuron, and triclopyr when young and succulent. Susceptible to glyphosate with wipe-on applicators (to avoid injury to pasture grasses). Mature ragwort is susceptible to foliar applications of MCPA and tebuthiuron.

Biological – Can be controlled with targeted grazing by sheep and goats but too much in the diet causes illness and death. A Madagascar moth (*Secusio extensa*) appears to be a highly specific and a voracious feeder of ragwort.

**PIER Risk Assessment:** High Risk, score: 23
a) Senecio leaves and flowers

b) Roadside infestation of Senecio

c) Close-up of Senecio flower heads

d) Pasture infested by Senecio

e) Senecio seeds on the flower head

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