

POPULATION, DISTRIBUTION AND ADVERSE EFFECTS OF  
FERAL GOATS AT HALEAKALA NATIONAL PARK

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Goats, Capra hircus, originally introduced to the Hawaiian Islands by Captains Cook and Vancouver, had established sizeable feral populations on East Maui by the time Haleakala became a National Park in 1916. Since then more than twenty thousand of them have been removed or killed and yet significant populations remain. The changes that this species has wrought upon the Park through browsing, exotic plant dispersal and accelerated erosion are so tremendous and have occurred for such a long time that the remaining flora is only a faint shadow of what it would have been in the absence of these animals.

Numerous herds range over more than 90% of the Crater District. Many of these cross to and from adjacent private and state land along nearly half that boundary and contribute to the Park population estimated at 700. Recent excursions into three rain forest areas indicate dynamic herd ranging to escape control efforts and show the need for advance planning in dealing with the species.

Haleakala's terrain is ideal for goats but it hinders control efforts considerably. Elevation differences along the 29-mile Crater District boundary exceed 1800 feet and terrain and vegetation conditions range from alpine deserts through dense pukiawe on rough a'a to ohia and koa rain forests. Efforts at boundary fencing, long recognized by the Park Service as the key to eradicating the species, have until recently been thwarted by high initial costs, poor access, nearly vertical palis and climatic factors that discourage the construction and maintenance of any type of barrier.

If implemented, the use of intensified eradication measures including Park Service and Deputy hunting, helicopter roundups and air-borne "swat" teams in conjunction with boundary and internal fencing should turn the corner on the goat problem at Haleakala and start the Park and its flora on the road to recovery.