

# Here we go again: Military to bomb fragile island

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By Michael G. Hadfield

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Not another Kahoolawe!

Another unique Pacific island has been selected by the U.S. military for "live fire training."

Pagan Island, a biological treasure house and an ancestral home to Chamorro people, lies 200 miles north of Saipan in the middle of the Northern Marianas chain.

Only 10 miles long and 1 to 4 miles wide, Pagan is made up of two volcanoes: Mount Pagan is still active, pouring out a near constant column of smoke and steam; the southern volcano, last active in the late 1800s, retains native forests that serve as home to species of birds, snails, insects and plants unique to the Marianas. Pagan Island is spectacularly beautiful.

On March 14, the Navy announced its "intent to prepare the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands Joint Military Training Environmental Impact Statement/Overseas Environmental Impact Statement (Federal Register /Vol. 78, No. 50 /Thursday, March 14, 2013 /Notices 16257).



This document states: "The proposed action is to establish a series of live-fire and maneuver Ranges and Training Areas within the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands to meet this purpose," and only Tinian and Pagan islands meet specifications.

Further details are at the website: [www.CNMIJointMilitaryTrainingEIS.com](http://www.CNMIJointMilitaryTrainingEIS.com).

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Most alarming is the statement regarding Pagan Island: "The U.S. military intends to use the entire island with a full spectrum of weapons and joint training activities."

In May 2010, seven colleagues and I spent 11 days on Pagan Island surveying for a rare tree-snail species whose range extends only from Guam in the south to Pagan Island in the north.

The species, *Partula gibba*, once abundant on Guam, has been so decimated there by introduced predators and habitat destruction that it is nearly extinct and is listed as "endangered" by the Territory of Guam.

It has vanished from Tinian, exists in only a single known population on Saipan, and has unknown numbers on the small islands between Saipan and Pagan. We found this rare Mariana tree snail on Pagan Island. There are perhaps a few hundred snails there in an area less than a mile in diameter. Our genetic studies reveal that snail populations are unique to each island.

In addition, the birds we saw on Pagan Island all belonged there; there were no introduced mynahs, cardinals, doves or any of the other non-native birds that greet us on the streets of Honolulu. Pagan Island is home to the Mariana fruit bat, also declared endangered on Guam, and the Micronesian Megapode, endangered throughout its range.

Importantly, Pagan Island is considered home by many Chamorro people. Although the entire population of Pagan was removed at the time of the last eruption of Mount Pagan in 1981, many of them return to the island whenever possible and a few reside there continuously. They value Pagan Island as much as any people value their ancestral homes.

There are many reasons why Pagan Island should be preserved, but most of all we should ask: Why should more lands, especially unique islands, be bombed into oblivion? Is it not enough that much of Kahoolawe was turned into

bare rock by military bombardment, and that great stretches of that island remain inaccessible because of the unexploded bombs and shells buried in the soil?

The military continues to devastate vast stretches of Pohakuloa Training Area on the Big Island and Schofield Ranges on Oahu by bombing, strafing and shelling. Why more?

Those who care about the Earth or who know first-hand what military "live-fire training" does to an island, should send comments and objections by May 12 via the "comment form" on the military website above.

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