

66°

WEATHER ALERTS /High Surf Advisory: **Kauai Leeward, Kauai Windward, Maui Central Valley, Maui Windward West, Molokai Leeward, Molokai Windward, Niihau, Oahu Koolau, Oahu North Shore, Olomana, Waianae Coast, Windward Haleakala**

TOP STORIES

Police arrest three and uncover hundreds of dumped vehicles in sweep of 'chop shop' near Whitmore Village

by: [Jenn Boneza](#)

Posted: Feb 27, 2020 / 05:48 PM HST / Updated: Feb 27, 2020 / 09:37 PM HST

HONOLULU (KHON2)—Dozens of law enforcement swept an area near Whitmore Village Thursday. The area was notorious for illegal activity and being used as a mass dumping ground.

Multiple law enforcement agencies collaborated in the sweep, arresting three men and letting nearly a dozen others off with warnings for trespassing.

The sweep comes several weeks after Maria Soma-Valmoja was shot and killed in the area, and after months of complaints that the State's Agribusiness Development Corporation Project was mismanaging the land.

"Just looking at the scale of it, it's going to be substantial to the clean up but it will happen immediately," said Ken Nakamoto, a project manager for the Agribusiness Development Corporation Project.

More than 230 acres of land is owned by the Agribusiness Development Corporation Project. According to community members, much of it has been a haven for criminal activity for some time.

Thursday's sweep was a collaboration between numerous law enforcement agencies, the Attorney General's office and the Department of Agriculture.

66°

items, rubbish and mounds of trash goes on and on—all of it hidden behind the tall grass off of Kamehameha Highway near Whitmore Village.

KHON: “What does the state believe was happening on this property?”

“Multiple criminal activities,” explained Nakamoto.

“Anywhere from stolen vehicles and illegal dumping. This looks like a chop shop. I mean I don’t know exactly what was going on because it was too dangerous for our staff to come in here alone.”

In January, the body of 30-year-old Malia Soma-Valmoja was found near the area shot dead inside a car.

Nakamoto said that was the tipping point that spurred Thursday’s sweep.

According to police, three men were arrested—two for unauthorized entry into a motor vehicle and one for outstanding warrants.

Eleven others were given warnings for trespassing.

Nakamoto said the sweep was just the beginning. They also wanted to make sure they could secure the property to ensure no one would return over night.

“The next step will be the most costly, it will be the clean up. The environmental clean up, the removal of vehicles, the clearing of the trees from the land and the prepping for agriculture.”

Nakamoto said it will likely cost between \$2 to 3 million just to clear the trees, grass and some of the cars.

He said they’ll have to hire contractors to remove the rest, which will cost much more.

66°

KHON: "Do you have any idea how many vehicles are on this property?"

"Rough estimate– 200 to 300 vehicles," said Nakamoto.

KHON: "How many of those vehicles do you think are stolen?"

"We anticipate encountering numerous stolen vehicles but we don't know the actual number yet," explained Nakamoto.

Senator Donovan Dela Cruz, who has been working with law enforcement, said the sweep has been a long time coming.

"We wished it would have happened sooner but ADC finally enlisted the Honolulu Police Department's help. Now we need to come up with a plan so this doesn't happen again," said Dela Cruz.

That plan is already underway.

"We are currently constructing a reservoir basically a mile from this area, which is to service this property. That is scheduled to be online around April, May of this year," said Nakamoto.

Nakamoto said that HPD will be policing the area around the clock while the Department of Agriculture works to remove the vehicles and other rubbish and prepare the land to be leased to farmers.

Copyright 2020 Nexstar Broadcasting, Inc. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten, or redistributed.

SHARE THIS STORY

MORE TOP STORIES STORIES