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Offensive against two public menaces [1]

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By Liz Yanira Del Valle Huellas / Special El Nuevo Día endi.com [2] They are two invasive species. One is of the vegetal kingdom; the other from the animal. The first one, not as popular as the second, which has fame of terrorist at Luis Muñoz Marín International Airport. We are talking about the melaleuca tree and the iguana. Both species, are the protagonists of the new projects of the Partnership of the San Juan Bay Estuary (CEBSJ), threaten to deteriorate the estuary's ecosystem of the estuary. According to Jorge Bauzá Ortega, environmental scientist of CEBSJ, the term invasive is used when exotic species disturbs native species, by displacing or marginalizing them, or affects the ecosystem of the region where they were introduced accidentally. The melaleuca or "Melaleuca quinquenervia" is native of Australia and other regions of the South Pacific. It is said that it was introduced in the Island in the 1920's with ornamental purposes. In 1997, melaleuca trees were identified to the south of the Suárez Canal. Thiis channel is one of the water bodies that conform the EBSJ. "We already have a group of melaleuca tree in a wetland adjacent to this channel. Is the only we've identified in the EBSJ, and we cannot let it propagate", said Bauzá. The doctor in oceonography, explained that melaleuca dries out wetlands actino like a straw. Besides having high discharge rates, it sheds leaves too often, filling up the wetlands gradually changing the characteristics of the zone to one of higher ground. The herbaceous freshwater wetlands of the EBSJ are very important because they serve as a habitat for birds and fish, stabilize and assimilate the polluting agents dragged by the currents that come from the urban areas (higher ground) and protect the surrounding communities from possible floods. According to the Integral Plan of Handling and Conservation of the CEBSJ, from 1936-1995 the EBSJ has lost 49,5% of the total area of herbaceous wetlands, making it crucial to protect what's left. In the next month, CEBSJ will initiate the removal of the trees in collaboration with the DRNA and the US Fish & Wild Life Service. "The process does not require machineries. Adult trees have been identified and Hill be injected with Rodal herbicide. This herbicide is approved to be used in wetlands because it does not affect the rest of the

ecosystem”, indicated Bauzá. The scientist added that among the native species replacin melaleuca are: “pterocarpus officinalis”, “anona squamosa”, almond tree, mangrove and beach grape. While, the project for the control of the iguanas is in its initial phase, it is not less important. These animals not only have put in risk the Airport security system, personnel of the Department of Natural and Environmental Resources (DRNA), but also personnel of the CEBSJ. “The iguanas eat the tender mangrove leaves, not allowing them to regenerate. With their nails they scrape and tear the trunk’s crust, amking them more vulnerable to become ill. They eat the little crabs and the eggs of the birds that live in the EBSJ”, added. For the EBSJ, mangrove swamps are as important as wetlands. They provides feeding, mating, and resting zones for birds and reptiles. Vegetal decomposition in mangroves is transformed into organic matter that serves as food for crabs, moluscs, shrimps and fish. CEBSJ will work on iguana control project with the Coquí Project of the University of Puerto Rico.

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