

FINAL

**STATEMENT OF
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USDA, FOREST SERVICE
Before the
Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands
Committee on Resources
United States House of Representatives
Concerning: Noxious Weeds and Invasive Plants**

June 24, 1999

MR. CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE:

Thank you for the opportunity to tell you what the Forest Service is doing to combat the spread of non-native noxious weeds and other invasive plants, a critical problem to the health of forest and rangeland ecosystems in the United States. Non-native noxious weeds and invasive plants have increased rangeland wildfire and erosion, and generally lower the value of the land. In short the spread of non-native invasive species causes biodiversity loss and impairs ecosystem function.

Within the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), every aspect of invasive species management is considered in developing integrated programs and budgets, policies and management activities, regulation and research programs. The Forest Service program of work is enhanced by activities of USDA's sister agencies Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Agricultural Research Service, Cooperative State Research Education and Extension Service, Economic Research Service, Farm Services Agency, and Natural Resources Conservation Service. These activities include stopping

new invasive species from entering the country, providing early detection and control, providing technical advice to States and private landowners, and ensuring the latest treatment information and technology is readily accessible and implemented.

The Forest Service has taken many actions over the past 5 years increasing the priority of non-native noxious weeds and invasive species in our policies and programs. To sustain natural resources and restore watershed health, our approach has been one of integration and coordination of decisions and activities, across all mission areas and landownerships, and with other Federal, state, tribal, and private partners.

The Forest Service is especially concerned about the effects of invasive plants and non-native noxious weeds in the Intermountain West. For example, yellow starthistle, leafy spurge, and spotted knapweed have spread over millions of acres, harming both private and public lands. In response, we released a noxious weed policy in 1995 and a formal strategy, "Stemming the Invasive Tide" in 1996, whose main components include:

- research and development to enhance protection and restoration of all forests and rangelands;
- financial and technical assistance for all privately owned forested lands; and
- management to correct plant pest and noxious weed problems on Federal lands.

Research and Development (R&D)

The Forest Service's R&D program for invasive species develops technology for non-native invasive species management and builds understanding of species' biology and interactions within ecosystems by:

- monitoring and assessing economic and environmental effects of nonnative invasive species;
- controlling and mitigating invasive species effects emphasizing biologically based controls for established populations;
- early detection and eradication; and
- restoration of native species and habitats in degraded areas.

Forest Service Research and Development works with a coalition of 17 Federal agencies to determine government-wide science priorities. In addition we work with states, universities and private sector regional partnerships. Some examples of these efforts include research to support Operation *Miconia* in Hawaii, the kudzu team in the south, and the alliance of northern universities; Utah State University and the Universities of Idaho, Montana, and Washington for research in the intermountain west. In fiscal year 1999, 19 technology development projects were jointly funded and implemented with state and private forestry.

State and Private Forestry (S&PF)

The Forest Service state and private forestry program provides technical assistance to noxious weed managers, through the Forest Health Protection program, for design and implementation of integrated non-native noxious weed management systems and on the use of pesticides and biological control agents. For example, this program helps Hawaii manage non-native invasive weed species as provided for by the Hawaii Tropical Forestry Recovery Act.

The forest health protection staff is developing technology for rearing and releasing biological control agents as part of integrated pest management for use against such non-

native invasive plant species as mile-a-minute weed, cogongrass, kudzu and Dyer's woad.

In the intermountain west, the National Forests through the state and private forestry program, provide biocontrol technology to local landowners. At the Malad Field Day in Idaho, the Forest Service sponsored a leafy spurge field session. County, State and Federal personnel along with private landowners, were invited to learn how to collect, transport and release *Aphthona* beetles on leafy spurge. The 70 participants were also shown how to set up their own insectaries to grow more beetles for release on their own leafy spurge infestations. We are encouraging these good neighbor partnerships where working across fencelines slows the spread of non-native noxious weeds.

In addition through the Forest Stewardship Program, which is operated by the states through the state foresters, we can provide professional assistance for plans that prescribe management practices for treatments, and through the stewardship incentive program we can also provide cost sharing dollars for controlling invasive species.

National Forest System Lands

We estimate that 6 to 7 million acres of National Forest lands are infested with non-native noxious weeds and last year we treated 117,500 acres to control weeds. The Forest Service works with partners to develop local weed management areas. Such local partnerships are supported by a national program, "Pulling Together Partnerships". The Forest Service and other Federal agencies involved in this program committed \$1.05 million to project work in fiscal year 1999 and local sponsors matched that with nearly \$1.8 million.

We also conduct public education and outreach, a non-native noxious weed-seed free forage program, and development of national Best Management Practices for Forest Service weed control. We sponsor local weed pulling days and workshops to teach landowners how to use biocontrol agents. The non-native noxious weed-seed free forage program is aimed at reducing the source of weeds introduced through livestock feed.

The Forest Service, as part of our stewardship of natural resources, is committed to a collaborative program of work with public and private partners preventing entry, early detection and eradication, control and restoration. Controlling invasive and non-native noxious weeds is a key piece of the Forest Service natural resource agenda for sustaining forests and watershed health.

This concludes my statement, I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.