



The Wyoming Department of Agriculture is dedicated to the promotion and enhancement of Wyoming's agriculture, natural resources and quality of life.

Statement of Jason Fearneyhough, Director, State of Wyoming - Department of Agriculture

Chairman Bishop and Ranking Member Grijalva, as well as other Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Jason Fearneyhough and I have served as Director of the Wyoming Department of Agriculture for the past four years and as Deputy Director of the Department before that. Along with this, I currently serve as the chairman for the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture - Natural Resource Committee, and I am the past chairman of the Western Association of State Departments of Agriculture. I'm pleased to appear before you today to discuss the impacts invasive species have on our nation's natural resources and the challenges we face with their management.

Wyoming began its battle with invasive species in 1895 with its first noxious weed law targeting Russian thistle, or what many of you may recognize as the western tumbleweed. At that time, homeowners were limited in their ability to identify the plant and lacked the resources to control the spread of the species. This made it easy for Russian thistle to establish itself throughout the state and the west in spite of the legislature's well intended efforts. While the law didn't stop the Russian thistle, it created the foundation for the state's current weed and pest program. Today, we are able to assist land owners and managers with locally funded educational workshops, cost-share incentives, and coordinated landscape based planning through the efforts of the state's weed and pest control districts. Because of these programs, the state has eradicated Yellow starthistle (a toxic plant that covers more than 12 million acre in California) and we have kept our waterway clear of Eurasian watermilfoil and the invasive quagga mussel.

Many of the western states have similar invasive species programs to Wyoming that match, or surpass our own, in their preventative, educational and management efforts, and funding. In addition to these programs, many of the western states have Universities and USDA – ARS experiment stations that are continually improving our understanding of the invasive species issue and the cost effective ways we can manage them. This is no longer just an agricultural issue. We have a broader understanding of the impacts these species play on our ecological systems, communities, recreation, and human health. This broader recognition has created multifaceted efforts with a unified call for action and has brought together local agriculture producers, natural resource agencies, and non-government representatives to work collectively on short and long-term management goals. It has also created the consolidated USDA-APHIS Plant Protection Act, education programs such as the National Firewood Task Force, and have made on the ground successes like the recent eradication of Asian longhorn beetle from New Jersey possible.

In Wyoming, the federal government manages more than 48% of the lands in our borders. Like many western states, our invasive species program success is heavily influenced by the cooperation of the federal agencies. The local federal representatives, along with regional and national offices, typically understand and share the same concerns on invasive species. The USFS lists "the introduction and spread of invasive species" as a top four threat to the national forests and grasslands. The Bureau of Land Management website states that the "rapid expansion of weeds across public lands" is one of the greatest obstacles to achieving ecosystem health. The Department of Defense has a website that addresses the growing ecological and economic damage caused by invasive species on defense installations. Along with this, a National Invasive Species Council was created by Executive Order and the Federal Interagency Committee for the Management of Noxious and Exotic Weeds to assist federal agencies in the collaborative invasive species efforts.

Equal Opportunity in Employment and Services

BOARD MEMBERS

Jana Ginter, *District 1* • Jim Hodder, *District 2* • Shaun Sims, *District 3* • John Moore, *District 4* • Alison Lass, *District 5*
Bryan Brost, *District 6* • Jim Price, Jr., *District 7*

YOUTH BOARD MEMBERS

Patrick Zimmerer, *Southeast* • Richard Schlenker, *Northwest* • John Hansen, *Southwest* • Cameron Smith, *Northeast*



The Wyoming Department of Agriculture is dedicated to the promotion and enhancement of Wyoming's agriculture, natural resources and quality of life.

In most cases, the local, state, and federal agencies have the right knowledge, information, and people in place to make a positive difference on invasive species. While we have this positive situation, we lack the ability to fully implement what they know. We rely on short term grants, limited local or state funding sources, or intra-agency generosity and simply do not have the fiscal resources to implement long-term, landscape scale control. Consequently, we are confined to successful detection and planning but fall short on implementation. In the west, where various federal agencies may manage adjoining land masses, the problem can be compounded by the variation in agency funding, policy, and/or priorities.

For example, Teton County Wyoming is situated in the northwest corner of the state and it is approximately 3 million acres in size. Within its boundaries, the majority of land is managed by federal agencies who oversee Yellowstone National Park and Grand Teton National Park, the National Elk Refuge, and the Bridger-Teton National Forest. The county's natural resources draw in millions of tourist annually with visitors from all corners of the world who are potentially bringing noxious weed seeds or non-native insects in their luggage, as hitchhikers on their cars, or as food. To protect the natural resources from invasive weeds, Teton County organized The Jackson Hole Weed Management Association in 1998 through an agreement with non-profit organizations and the federal, state, and local government agencies. The association has identified the invasive weeds that pose the greatest threat to the ecosystem, and have prioritized treatment areas based on the threat. Many of those high priority areas are highways, wildlife corridors, and public access points located on federal lands. The Association attempts to pool resources to mitigate the threat in these areas and strengthen each agencies response to their respective lands through the collective approach. While each party was a willing participant on paper, the federal agencies response is limited or fragmented due to lack of funding and resources when the window of opportunity for treatment is open. Without the proper resources to manage the invasive species threat, the Association can only hope to slow the spread of invasive weeds through selective control rather than reducing the impacted acres through prioritized management.

A good regional example of insufficient on the ground support is cheatgrass. Wyoming and many western states have been working diligently to avoid the listing of the sage-grouse as an endangered species and a primary threat to the species is sage brush degradation due to invasive grasses. Cheatgrass matures quicker than native grasses, is highly susceptible to fire and recovers from fire quicker than native grasses. Sage brush communities historically experience wildfires on a 50 year or more cycle, but cheatgrass can reduce that cycle to 5 years or less which makes it difficult for native sagebrush to re-establish. Simply stated, with no sagebrush there is no sage-grouse. In 2007, the Governors of Wyoming, Nevada, Idaho and Utah signed an agreement to coordinate efforts on cheatgrass and other wildfire issues. The agreement looked for cooperative efforts on management of cheatgrass beyond jurisdictional state boundaries. Unfortunately, the agreement has served very little purpose. The participating states were ready to act, but their best intentions were hampered by the inability to manage invasive species beyond the agency or state boundaries.

These examples are based on my experiences as Director of the Wyoming Department of Agriculture, but the issue of lacking resources for invasive species is not limited to my state or the west. Each state has its own set of invasive species issues and management needs. In the Southeast it may be giant African snail or Burmese python; in the Midwest it may be Asian carp or Asian longhorn beetle; in the Southwest it may be feral pigs or fire ants. Looking at these few examples, it's easy to see how invasive species are costing the United States nearly \$120 billion in losses annually. This includes the litany of new invasive plants, insects, and animals USDA-APHIS works to stave off at our harbors and ports each year. I've heard countless examples from my fellow directors and commissioners of the invasive

Equal Opportunity in Employment and Services

BOARD MEMBERS

Jana Ginter, *District 1* • Jim Hodder, *District 2* • Shaun Sims, *District 3* • John Moore, *District 4* • Alison Lass, *District 5*
Bryan Brost, *District 6* • Jim Price, Jr., *District 7*

YOUTH BOARD MEMBERS

Patrick Zimmerer, *Southeast* • Richard Schlenker, *Northwest* • John Hansen, *Southwest* • Cameron Smith, *Northeast*



The Wyoming Department of Agriculture is dedicated to the promotion and enhancement of Wyoming's agriculture, natural resources and quality of life.

species issues their states face. These concerns have resulted in NASDA's current invasive species policy which request the federal government to, "assert primary jurisdiction and assume a more dynamic leadership role in the interdiction and eradication of destructive invasive species."

I would like to close by respectfully offering some recommendations for your committee to consider as they look towards national solutions to invasive species. First, review and improve federal agency funding for invasive species management. Look at what is being allocated in each agency budget for invasive species, track where that funding is going, and evaluate if the funds are used effectively.

Secondly, support localized, state, and regional programs with funding to meet short-term and long-term management needs. The technical knowledge of these groups is superior in their ability to decide what should be done and what is practical. Along with this, centralize a funding source that is easily understood and accessible but demands results. Emphasize direct mitigation, without discounting the need for education, administration, and research. Make the rate of compensation sufficient to do the job properly, especially on incipient populations. It should also support a "color blind" approach to agency land management boundaries.

Finally, hold federal, state, and private entities fiscally responsible for any and all federal dollars spent. Review the successes and failures of the programs and disseminate that information to other professionals in the field so they might learn and adapt their programs based on the data. Use those reports to help determine when costs exceed the benefits.

I appreciate the opportunity your committee has provided today and look forward to answering any questions you might have.

Respectfully Submitted,

Director
Wyoming Department of Agriculture

Equal Opportunity in Employment and Services

BOARD MEMBERS

Jana Ginter, *District 1* • Jim Hodder, *District 2* • Shaun Sims, *District 3* • John Moore, *District 4* • Alison Lass, *District 5*
Bryan Brost, *District 6* • Jim Price, Jr., *District 7*

YOUTH BOARD MEMBERS

Patrick Zimmerer, Southeast • Richard Schlenker, Northwest • John Hansen, Southwest • Cameron Smith, Northeast