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Testimony on “*Giant Salvinia: How Do We Protect Our Ecosystems*”  
Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife, Oceans, and Insular Affairs  
House Committee on Natural Resources

June 27, 2011

### **Biographical Information**

Dr. Damon Waitt is Senior Director and Botanist at the Lady Bird Wildflower Center in Austin, Texas. A self-supporting Organized Research Unit of the University of Texas at Austin since 2006, the Wildflower Center was founded in 1982 and is nationally recognized as an innovative leader in plant conservation and environmental sustainability, as well as the premier national source of information on native plants and landscapes. Dr. Waitt serves as the principal investigator on several projects related to the Wildflower Center’s *Pulling Together Invasive Species Initiative* including the Invaders of Texas Citizen Science Program ([www.texasinvasives.org](http://www.texasinvasives.org)). In addition, Dr. Waitt serves on the Invasive Species Advisory Committee for the National Invasive Species Council, is founder and past-president of the Texas Invasive Plant and Pest Council, past chair of the National Association of Exotic Pest Plant Councils and past-president of the Texas Academy of Sciences. Waitt also serves on the Texas Invasive Species Coordinating Committee Advisory Group and acts as the Center’s liaison to the National Environmental Coalition on Invasive Species.

### **Testimony**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife, Oceans and Insular Affairs, thank you for the opportunity to speak before your group on the important issue of Giant Salvinia (GS). As I am sure you are aware, invasive species like GS are of great concern to those of us who care deeply about our natural and national heritage. But even as we are working to protect that heritage from climate change, land development and other pressures, natural ecosystems across the country – in our backyards, along our roadways, on our farms and ranches and in our waters – are facing a less obvious but equally serious threat from non-native invasive plants. Here are just a few of the problems caused by invasive species:

- After habitat destruction, invasive species are the second greatest threat to native biodiversity. Invasives threaten the survival of native plants and animals, interfere with ecosystem functions, and hybridize with native species resulting in negative genetic impacts.
- Invasive species impede industry, recreation, threaten agriculture, endanger human

health, and are becoming increasingly harder to control as a result of rapid global commercialization and human travel.

- Invasive species are a significant threat to almost half of the native species currently listed as federally endangered.
- The costs to prevent, monitor and control invasive species combined with the costs to crop damage, fisheries, forests, and other resources cost the U.S. \$137 billion annually.

Today, you are going to hear a lot about the efforts to control GS on Caddo Lake, Lake Bistineau and other bodies of water in Texas and Louisiana. You will hear from field scientists and managers describing their successes and failures, dollars spent, bio-control initiatives, the impact of freezes and acres treated. While I am familiar with these issues, I would like to take this opportunity to share my personal experience with Lake Bistineau and Caddo Lake.

### **Lake Bistineau**

As the son of a USAF Pilot my family moved around quite a bit (Japan, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Panama). In 1972, my father was stationed at Barksdale Air Force Base and the Waitt family picked up once again and moved to Bossier City, Louisiana. I was eleven years old when Lake Bistineau became my lake. Bistineau was where we camped, where I caught my first fish, where I had my birthday parties, where I was the captain of the Jon Boat. In my teen years, Lake Bistineau was where I skied, met girls and snuck my first beer. Nature Deficit Disorder did not exist at Bistineau. Like the Spanish moss draped from the cypress trees, Bistineau was draped in nature. You were surrounded by it, immersed in it and even intimidated by it but you could by no means escape it. It is sad to think these kinds of experiences are no longer available to the eleven year olds of 2011. Bistineau helped define me and started me on a path that led to a Ph.D. in botany, the Wildflower Center and a passion to protect ecosystems from invasive species.

### **Caddo Lake**

My experience with Caddo Lake came later in life and was primarily second-hand from a woman who grew up in Karnack, Texas. With her mother dead, her much older brothers gone and her father running the local general store, there was little time for little, five-year-old Claudia Alta Taylor. As a child, Claudia found solace in nature paddling the dark bayous of Caddo Lake, under ancient cypress trees decorated with Spanish moss just like Lake Bistineau. The sense of place that came from being close to the land never left her. She would devote much of her life to preserving it. It helped define her and started her down on a path that led to the White House, Highway Beautification, and the

National Wildflower Research Center. That young woman was, of course, Lady Bird Johnson, America's Environmental First Lady.

One of Lady Bird's most famous quotes goes: "**The environment is where we all meet; where all have a mutual interest; it is the one thing all of us share. It is not only a mirror of ourselves, but a focusing lens on what we can become.**" I think we agree that we all have a mutual interest in controlling the GS, the question is what we can become which leads me to my next point.

## **Coordination**

You have in this room all the **ingredients** to address the threat of GS (research, bio-control, herbicide programs, volunteer support, a management plan, etc.). What seems to be lacking is the **recipe** that combines these ingredients into a coordinated effort that will solve the GS problem.

My recommendation would be to integrate all GS management resources across jurisdictional boundaries. There is a precedent for this approach in Cooperative Weed Management Areas (CWMAs) that are springing up (with the exception of Texas and Louisiana) all across the United States (Figure 1). CWMAs are local partnerships that coordinate efforts to address the threat of invasive plants across jurisdictional boundaries. They include local citizens, city, county, state and federal leaders, and both nonprofit organizations and for-profit corporations. CWMAs go by different names in different parts of the country, for example, Partnerships for Regional Invasive Species Management (PRISMs), Cooperative Invasive Species Management Areas (CISMAs), or Invasive Species Teams or Partnerships. They can be organized in a variety of ways, but they all share six basic characteristics:

- 1) They operate within a defined geographic area, distinguished by a common geography, weed problem, community, climate, political boundary, or land use.
- 2) They involve a broad cross-section of landowners and natural resource managers within the boundaries.
- 3) They are governed by a steering committee.
- 4) They have a long-term commitment to cooperation, usually through a formal agreement among partners.
- 5) They have a comprehensive plan that addresses the management of invasive species within their boundaries.
- 6) They facilitate cooperation and coordination across jurisdictional boundaries.

## **Why establish a CWMA?**

**CWMAs cross geographical and political boundaries.** Groups that have an agreement in place that allows cooperation across boundaries can address invasive plants on the landscape as a whole, rather than piecemeal. GS doesn't know the difference between

the Texas and Louisiana side of Caddo Lake. Coordinated invasive plant management efforts are likely to be much more effective than treating a particular species at different times and with different methods on separate properties.

**CWMAs allow partners to share and leverage limited resources for the benefit of all.**

One partner may have a group of dedicated volunteers, another may have tools or herbicides they are willing to share, and another may have the ability to send press releases to media contacts. Partners joining together have access to more resources.

**CWMAs are highly visible, building community awareness and participation.**

Cooperative efforts can bring the issue of invasive plants to the attention of state and federal legislators and demonstrate broad support from the community for preventing and controlling invasive species.

**CWMAs can improve control efforts by training all partners in the use of best management practices.** Training local landowners in control methods can reduce non-target damage and help them select the most appropriate methods for their situation.

**CWMAs can provide an early detection and rapid response network** by ensuring that all the partners are aware of and are able to identify and respond to new infestations.

**CWMAs can help secure funding.** An established CWMA can access multiple funding sources, including government grants, private foundation grants, and donations. The “pulling together” concept is attractive to many funders such as NFWF.

Having established a cooperative partnership, you will make progress on the GS problem and be better prepared to address the next invasive species to arrive. For as long leave our guard down and our borders open, new threats will surely arrive bringing me to my last point.....prevention.

## **Prevention**

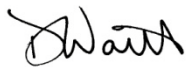
Prevention is the first-line of defense. It is the most cost-effective approach because once a species becomes widespread; controlling it may require significant and sustained expenditures. Public investment in prevention tools, resources and infrastructure is indispensable in protecting human health, agriculture and natural resources. To that end I encourage this subcommittee to take a close look at two federal initiatives:

**1. Revise the Lacey Act to require screening of animal imports.** The Lacey Act provides authority for the FWS to name groups of animals as “injurious species” and thus restrict their import. However, it does not require that animal species being proposed for

import be screened for either invasiveness or disease risk first. This creates unacceptable threats to native wildlife, to the economy, and to human and animal health. Thus, Congress should provide the FWS with the necessary authority to screen invasive animals, both terrestrial and aquatic, rather than relying on the Lacey Act's currently ineffective 100 year old provisions.

**2. Speed up and strengthen the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA's) revision of plant regulations to screen out weedy imports.** Intentional horticultural and nursery imports are the top pathway for the introduction of harmful weeds. Other nations have significantly reduced weedy introductions—and have reaped major economic benefits—by adopting risk screening protocols. The United States urgently needs a similar approach. The Obama administration should direct the USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) to promptly complete its revision of regulations for importing plants, known as Quarantine 37, or "Q-37." APHIS released proposed improvements in 2009 but has not yet implemented them. This effort needs a jump-start by the administration.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.



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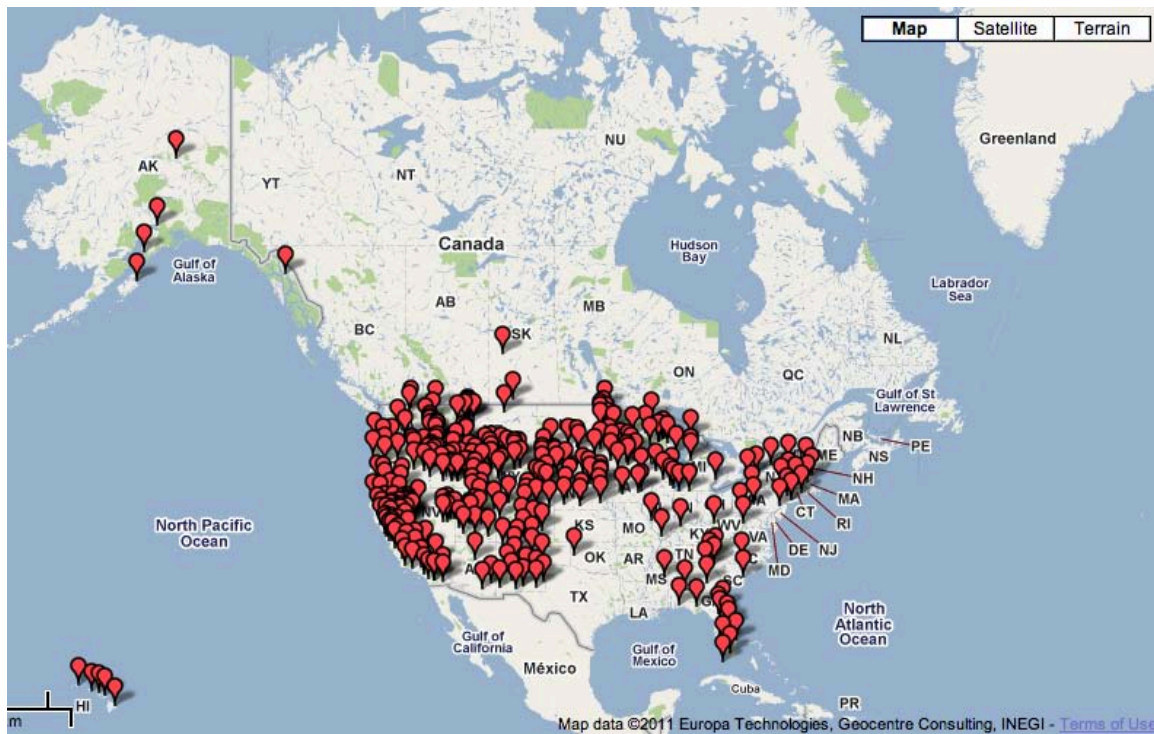


Figure 1. Distribution of Cooperative Weed Management Areas (CWMA), Partnerships for Regional Invasive Species Management (PRISMs) and Cooperative Invasive Species Management Areas (CISMAs) in North America.