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Testimony of

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Before the

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Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans

and National Parks, Recreation and Public Lands

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Good afternoon and thank you very much for the opportunity to speak before this joint oversight hearing on invasive species in America. My name is James Carlton. I am a marine biologist, and I have been working with exotic species invasions in our coastal waters since 1962. I am also the founding Editor-in-Chief of the international scientific journal, Biological Invasions.

My words today are as they were when I spoke here before Congress on June 14th, 1990; June 19th, 1990; October 27th, 1993; July 11th, 1996; July 17th, 1996; September 19th, 1996, and July 26th, 2001.

My words today are the same as in my previous 7 visits, except for one major difference: Since I first spoke 13 years ago before the House Subcommittee on Fisheries and Wildlife Conservation and the Environment there are now perhaps 500 more exotic species in this country -- on our lands, in our rivers and lakes, and in our coastal oceans.

The impact of exotic species is not imagined. It is not in doubt. It is not xenophobia: every single element of the American hamburger -- the wheat bun, the meat, the lettuce, the tomato, the pickle, the onion -- consists of non-native species. Rather, we have a cornucopia of clear, abundant, overpowering, titanic, and simply walloping -- data that thousands of accidentally introduced exotic species in this country have lead to vast social, economic, environmental, and industrial impacts costing us billions and billions and billions of dollars.

It is that simple.

We have invasive species laws, and they are important ones. However, in general they are tended to by a relatively few hard-working people with so little funding that a few kitchen ants -- which by the way are native to Argentina -- could carry the money away.

We play ecological roulette, we play economic roulette, we play industrial roulette every single minute in America with non-native animals and plants. Our activities are not simply "speeding up" or repeating natural vectors that transport species, such as winds or birds -- by bridging all natural barriers, human-mediated dispersal transports species that could never naturally arrive in America.

We have to get serious about exotic species. They need to be on our radar and not below our radar. We

have to get serious about serious funding. We have to get serious about enacting invasive species legislation before Congress -- now and not later. We have to be willing to be aggressive in addressing this absolutely fundamental economic and environmental issue. It is clear that Americans support this effort: The annual Earth Day Gallup Poll taken two weeks ago found that 80% of the public endorse immediate action to prevent any further major environmental disruptions.

By the time I come before you and announce the latest, most kick-butt invasions in the Great Lakes, in Kansas, in the Chesapeake Bay, or in San Francisco Bay, it is by and large too late. If it's raining we close the windows and then think about mopping up.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is raining:

-- it is raining exotics in the continental United States,

-- it is raining exotics in Hawaii, and in our territories and commonwealths such as American Samoa, Guam, and Puerto Rico,

-- it is raining exotics on our contiguous neighbors,

-- and the windows are still open.

Thank you.