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**Testimony of
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United States Department of Agriculture

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Committee on Resources
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Mr. Chairman, my name is Bill Clay and I am the Deputy Administrator for Wildlife Services, a program within the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. Thank you for the opportunity to be here today and to testify before you and the Subcommittee on H.R. 3479 "The Brown Tree Snake Control and Eradication Act of 2003." We appreciate that the proposed legislation introduced by Representatives Bordallo, Case and Abercrombie recognizes the critical role that Wildlife Services plays in controlling the brown tree snake and provides support for the expansion of our program activities.

Before I talk about the proposed legislation, I would like to take just a moment to provide you with some background on our program. Wildlife Services is unique in that we are a cooperatively funded program that has the Federal leadership and expertise to resolve problems caused by wildlife. Other Federal, State and local governments as well as private companies and individuals experiencing conflicts with wildlife request our assistance to stop wildlife and invasive species, such as the brown tree snake, from damaging public property, agriculture, natural ecosystems, threatening public health and safety, or preying upon threatened and endangered species. In December of 2003, I testified before this committee on the role Wildlife Services plays in managing damage caused by non-native migratory birds, such as mute swans and European starlings.

The brown tree snake, accidentally introduced on Guam in the late 1940s or early 1950s, is extremely abundant on the island with localized estimates sometimes reaching 20 or more snakes per acre of jungle. The brown tree snake has caused extensive economic and ecological damage to Guam. An opportunistic feeder, the snake has eradicated most of Guam's native forest birds, turning to lizards as bird populations have declined. In the brown tree snake's native habitat of Australia and Papua New Guinea, its populations are kept in check through natural processes such as disease, competition for food, and predation.

Although Guam is several thousand miles from Hawaii, it poses a very real threat to the State's ecology and natural resources. Experts have tried to put a dollar value on the damage that would result if the brown tree snake were to become established on Hawaii, but the cost has been difficult to estimate because it's hard to attach a monetary figure to the extinction of an entire bird species, such as Guam's indigenous flycatcher. I would like to thank the Committee for recognizing the serious threat that the brown tree snake poses to our natural as well as economic resources.

Wildlife Services has been working on Guam since the mid-1990s to manage damage caused by the brown tree snake and to prevent its spread to Hawaii and other Pacific Islands. In cooperation with the Department of the Interior and the Department of Defense, Wildlife Services works 24 hours a day, seven days a week to trap snakes around all military and commercial air and seaports on Guam and to inspect outbound cargo to keep the brown tree snake from inadvertently "hitchhiking" to Hawaii or other Pacific islands. All of these

inspections are conducted with the assistance of Jack Russell terriers and Brittany spaniels that are specially trained to sniff out any snakes hidden away in cargo or on ships and aircraft. Our canine program currently has 10 dogs in the field. On average, Wildlife Services removes about 4,500 snakes per year from Guam's ports through trapping, hand capture and canine inspections.

H.R. 3479 recognizes the importance of containing and controlling the brown tree snake on Guam. If the invasive species were to become established on Hawaii or other Pacific Islands, the cost of setting up multiple control and eradication programs would be prohibitive. We need to continue to focus and infuse more resources where the problem currently exists, drastically reducing the brown tree snake's population on Guam and eliminating the snake from critical areas on the Island. Reducing the brown tree snake's population on Guam in coordination with targeted control efforts at Guam's ports will effectively help to protect other islands.

In addition to our work at Guam's ports, Wildlife Services is part of multiple efforts to support the recovery of the Island's endangered species, such as the Mariana crow. Our specialists use traps as well as toxicants to keep brown tree snakes from preying on the small number of remaining crows on the island. Since these protection measures were instituted in 1999, more than 6,000 brown tree snakes have been removed around targeted areas. At another location on the Island, Wildlife Services sets traps to establish a snake-free perimeter around 3 caves that serve as nesting and roosting sites for endangered Mariana grey swiftlets. These efforts are helping to recover bird species that might otherwise become extinct.

The brown tree snake has also been implicated in thousands of Guam's power outages, resulting in millions of dollars in damages in the past 25 years. To reduce the number of power failures due to brown tree snakes, Wildlife Services conducts extensive trapping and spotlighting of snakes at 13 power-generating substations across Guam. Over the past 4 years, more than 3,500 brown tree snakes have been removed from inside the perimeter fences of targeted substations.

In addition to authorizing resources to control the brown tree snake on Guam, H.R. 3479 would establish a pre-departure quarantine and inspection program for passenger baggage leaving Guam. While we believe that military and commercial cargo pose the greatest risk for allowing the brown tree snake to "hitchhike" to Hawaii and other Pacific Islands, Wildlife Services' snake detector dog program could be expanded to inspect passengers' luggage prior to departure. Efforts to control the spread of the brown tree snake through transportation pathways, would have to be established under the authority of our Agency's Plant Protection and Quarantine program, which has oversight of Guam's agriculture quarantine and inspection programs.

All of Wildlife Services' operational activities on Guam are possible due to methodology and tools developed in large part by the program's National Wildlife Research Center, which is dedicated to developing more effective methods to reduce the brown tree snake population on Guam. Currently, all brown tree snake research is funded through grants from the Department of the Interior and the Department of Defense. The research is conducted at our center's headquarters in Fort Collins, CO, with assistance from our Hawaii field station, which is dedicated to developing methods to reduce the brown tree snake population on Guam. Research to date has led to the development of fumigants for killing snakes in cargo, repellents and the discovery that acetaminophen, is a highly effective snake toxicant. All are registered and labeled for use by the Environmental Protection Agency.

Our wildlife biologists are currently putting a small amount of acetaminophen in dead mice, and placing them in locations that are attractive to the snakes. Research center scientists are also in the process of developing a synthetic, edible gelatin bait that contains acetaminophen and could be shaped like a lizard, one of the brown tree snakes' favorite prey. Distributed aerially, the synthetic lizards and mice containing acetaminophen could significantly reduce the brown tree snake population.

To keep the brown tree snake population from increasing, our scientists are also developing reproductive inhibitors. At our National Wildlife Research Center headquarters, we have a 900 square-foot simulated natural environment room where we are testing the effect of chemical sterilants on male snakes. In an attempt to replicate Guam's habitat and encourage mating, our researchers have filled the room with trees and leaves. They have even simulated the jungle's hot temperatures and high humidity. H.R. 3479 would provide additional authority for our scientists to continue this important research and establish a full-time research presence on Guam.

While Wildlife Services supports efforts to improve its brown tree snake control and research activities, any

additional funding under the authority of this legislation would be subject to the priorities and funding considerations in the annual budget process.

In addition to the expansion of program and research activities, H.R. 3479 also calls for the establishment of a "Brown Tree Snake Control and Eradication Committee."

We believe the existing framework, including the Brown Tree Snake Committee, created pursuant to the Nonindigenous Aquatic Nuisance Prevention and Control Act of 1990, in combination with the leadership of the National Invasive Species Council would be a more appropriate vehicle to accomplish the goals of the legislation than the Brown Tree Snake Eradication and Control Committee proposed to be established under section 7. At the technical committee's most recent meeting in Hawaii in February, we identified many of the same needs outlined in H.R. 3479. For example, a new Brown Tree Snake Control Plan needs to be created. The current plan dates back to 1996 with budget forecasts ending in 2001 and out-dated recommendations for control and research. With regard to the brown tree snake committee identified in the bill, Wildlife Services is appreciative that H.R. 3479 recognizes the dual role that Wildlife Services plays in this cooperative control effort by allowing for both a member from our research program as well as our operational program.

The importance of Interagency cooperation and coordination is further reinforced by the FY 2005 Invasive Species Performance-Based Crosscut Budget, which recognizes brown tree snake control as one of ten specific initiatives in the FY 2005. The Invasive Species Crosscut Budget, a performance-based budget proposal for federal agency expenditures concerning invasive species, was prepared for the first time for the FY 2004 budget. It was created in recognition of the fact that multiple agencies play a role in effective invasive species management. This coordination also serves to avoid redundancy in expenditures and therefore maximizes what can be accomplished with existing funds.

The FY 2005 Invasive Species Crosscut Budget, as derived from the President's FY 2005 Proposed Budget, shows federal expenditures of \$4,247,000 for the brown tree snake initiative, with the Department of the Interior contributing \$4,072,000 and USDA contributing \$513,000.

Mr. Chairman, Wildlife Services biologists, scientists and specialists have the education, background and professional expertise necessary to contain the brown tree snake on Guam and develop new research methods to reduce its population. We are continuing to work closely with the Department of the Interior, the Department of the Defense and other involved partners to use available resources as effectively as possible to stop the spread of the snake. The introduction of H.R. 3479 and your request for comments through this hearing, highlight your commitment to addressing the threats posed by the brown tree snake.

Thank you again, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to testify before you and the Subcommittee today. I am happy to answer any questions you or your colleagues may have regarding Wildlife Services' brown tree snake control and research activities.