

Committee on Resources

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STATEMENT OF FRED V. GRAU, JR.

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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEES ON FISHERIES, CONSERVATION, WILDLIFE AND OCEANS and NATIONAL PARKS, RECREATION AND PUBLIC LANDS

OVERSIGHT HEARING ON INVASIVE SPECIES

29 APRIL 2003

Thank you Mr. Chairman and committee members for the privilege of testifying here today.

My name is Fred V. Grau, Jr. and I am the President of Grasslyn, Inc., a family-owned farming and seed business based in Snyder, Colorado and State College, Pennsylvania. The clear water in Slab Cabin Run, a charming brook flowing through our Pennsylvania farm, eventually finds its way to the Chesapeake Bay. We grow crops such as corn, but our mainstay for the last half-century has been Penngift crownvetch seed.

Crownvetch, enacted as the Pennsylvania State Conservation and Beautification Plant, is unsurpassed in its ability to control erosion on steep, infertile slopes in the central and eastern United States. It has saved countless tons of soil and pesticides from entering the fisheries of the Chesapeake Bay. It smothers out harmful weeds and builds topsoil in the process. It is clearly beneficial.

However, crownvetch is not native. It is an "Invasive Species" according to the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). It is even a "Noxious Weed" according to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA).

Yellow starthistle, the Brown Tree Snake, and kudzu are known pests. But other "Invasive Species" are useful and the result of years of government research.

For example, tall fescue is the most important single turf and forage species in America and is also indispensable as a permanent slope cover. It is almost certainly a major component of your lawn, your kid's athletic field or your local golf course. Before you is a strip of top-quality sod, composed of 50% tall fescue.

Why fescue? It requires less water. Less fertilizer. Less pesticides. It is economical, functional, beautiful and environmentally friendly.

But fescue's contributions don't end with turf or animal feed. Ask roadside managers from the Virginia or Pennsylvania Departments of Transportation what two species are indispensable to their mandate for economical, aesthetically pleasing slope stabilization. Their response will be crownvetch and tall fescue.

Why, then, does the United State Department of Agriculture (USDA) specifically term tall fescue an "Invasive Species" and prohibit its use in the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) in the Chesapeake and Potomac Watersheds? The expressed purpose of this program is to "reduce nutrient and sediment loading under the Chesapeake Bay Agreement". Simply put, it is non-native and doesn't fit into the artificial, new, natives-are-good, non-natives-are-bad paradigm.

Another box of turf: This is a putting green. It is 100% bentgrass. Bentgrass is "invasive" according to USDA and Virginia's Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR).

Here is a vase of flowers. I purchased the bouquet this morning from a local florist. Every flower here displayed came from the florist's stockroom. Every flower is, or is a close relative of, an "Invasive Species".

The daisy: Do we ban members of this family because its subspecies cousin, the naturalized ox-eye daisy is considered noxious by the Ohio Department of Agriculture?

Babysbreath. What would prom night be without the lad's attempt to pin the corsage on your daughter's gown? But California considers this a Noxious Weed.

The majestic iris. Do we really want the Virginia DCR and their partners, the Virginia Native Plant Society, to set the stage for elimination of this unique beauty? Both consider a close relation, yellow iris, to be an "Invasive Species".

The lily. Those who prefer to drive through flyover country cannot help but notice the small, isolated clumps of orange radiance punctuating the green landscape of a Piedmont summer. Maryland's Department of Natural Resources names its virtually indistinguishable cousin, the day-lily, as "invasive".

I believe that an "Invasive Species" law will replicate the abuses of subspecies listings, as has occurred under the Endangered Species Act.

Federal agencies already have the authority to control harmful species. They will still have it without the Trojan Horse of a natives-only "Invasive Species" bill and the massive bureaucratic expansion that will ensue. Harmful species need no new law or initiative to be dealt with, as the effective eradication of the snakehead fish in Maryland demonstrates.

The basic framework of any regulation or legislation should be harmful versus beneficial, and not a misguided fixation on native versus non-native.

If current policy mistakes are codified, then 280 million Americans will be senselessly shackled by the newest weapon in the extremist's arsenal: an "Invasive Species Act".

Thank you.