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**Before the House Committee on Resources  
Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health  
“The Health of America’s Forests in 2006-Problems and Solutions”  
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Chairman Walden, Ranking Member Udall, thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Subcommittee this afternoon. My name is Paul Eggert and I am the Associate Deputy Administrator for Plant Protection and Quarantine with the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, or APHIS. I welcome the opportunity to explain the role APHIS plays in addressing invasive forest pests, as well as how we work with our colleagues at the U.S. Forest Service and other State and industry partners to help maintain the health of America’s forests.

I would also like to thank the Government Accountability Office for their thorough review of the hard work USDA has undertaken and the many challenges we face as we battle invasive forest pests. The nature of forest pests makes detection and control particularly difficult. Pathogens like *Phytophthora ramorum* or small insects that live the majority of their lives inside of trees challenge our survey and identification methods. Additionally, signs of infestation often mimic other, less serious problems.

For these reasons, in the past, forest pests have often gone undetected for extended periods of time. This can lead to large areas becoming affected, and costlier and more complicated control and eradication programs. GAO recognized these and other challenges in their review, and we support their recommendations for improving our future efforts. Among other things, we have been actively engaged in enhancing our surveillance capabilities in forests and other natural resource areas, as well as collecting more—and better—scientific information on pests that exist in other countries but could, one day, make their way to our country. And by ensuring that our emergency response capabilities are strong and coordinated with our Federal and State partners, we are better prepared to quickly address pest introductions and prevent further spread.

***APHIS and Agricultural/Environmental Safeguarding***

APHIS is charged with protecting American agriculture by preventing introductions of foreign agricultural pests and ensuring the health and marketability of U.S. livestock and crops. Our mission has always included the protection of natural resources and the environment, but in recent years, as the Agency’s capacity has increased, we have been better able to fulfill that portion.

The Agency's strategic plan and corresponding budget priorities therefore reflect the importance of comprehensive agricultural safeguarding systems to protect U.S. agriculture and the environment from the pest and disease risks associated with increased international trade and travel. APHIS' safeguarding systems focus on reducing pest risks to the United States; ensuring that agricultural products entering the country do not carry invasive pests; conducting aggressive domestic surveillance programs; and ensuring robust emergency response capabilities in the event of a significant pest introduction.

These safeguarding systems, then, encompass a broad array of regulatory and operational measures—from preclearance inspections of commodities by APHIS personnel in overseas countries before shipment to the United States; to pest survey programs abroad and here in our own country; to our scientists' preparation of thorough risk assessments on new commodity import requests, to the writing of new import regulations that enable agricultural trade to occur without jeopardizing the health of U.S. industries.

In combination, APHIS' main objective is to prevent the entry of invasive pests into the country by erecting overlapping security systems that effectively minimize the risk to U.S. agriculture. Again, while we have had success in the areas of emergency control and eradication, these programs are, more often than not, extremely costly, time-consuming, and disruptive to State and local economies. Accordingly, APHIS' budget and strategic planning emphasize offshore risk reduction and surveillance programs, where the aim is to mitigate the risk posed by agricultural products long before they reach U.S. ports of entry.

I would also note that APHIS has extensive legal authority to address invasive plant pests in the United States. The Plant Protection Act enables APHIS to set import regulations that help keep exotic pests and diseases out of the United States. When necessary, APHIS officials can also respond swiftly to detections of invasive plant pests that threaten U.S. agriculture or, in the case of forest pests, the environment.

### ***Offshore Risk Reduction***

GAO highlighted in its report how difficult it can be to prevent the entry of pests when there is little information about where they occur, how they are spread, and what plants they affect. Maintaining awareness of pest and disease situations abroad enables us to take the steps necessary to prevent the entry of exotic pests into the United States.

APHIS' Offshore Pest Information Program (OPIP) performs the essential function of collecting, assessing and reporting relevant pest and disease information from foreign countries. OPIP is conducted by APHIS employees stationed overseas. These employees, known as Safeguarding Officers, gather critical pest information and monitor trade trends. They look for any changes in production, processing, and shipping practices that could increase the risk of pest introductions into the United States.

That information is submitted as pest reports to APHIS officials in the United States via a web-based system, known as the Offshore Pest Information System (OPIS). Information reported through OPIS helps us make better policy decisions, such as where risk assessments should focus, when to modify port of entry inspection, when to initiate rulemaking for certain commodities, and what pests we should be surveying for at home. The Safeguarding Officers stationed overseas complement our other programs by helping to mitigate foreign pest risks in the country of origin rather than in the United States.

APHIS is also a member of several international organizations that work to prevent the spread of injurious pests and diseases. Most closely related to our discussion today of invasive forest pests is the International Plant Protection Convention, or IPPC. The IPPC is composed of 140 countries and works to develop and establish international plant health standards. The group also works to harmonize phytosanitary activities and facilitate the exchange of official, scientific information on pests and diseases among its member nations. I'll discuss in more detail some specific work that APHIS has done under IPPC a little further on in my testimony.

APHIS strives to connect with regional partners as well. The North American Plant Protection Organization (NAPPO) coordinates efforts among Canada, the United States, and Mexico to protect our plant resources from the entry, establishment, and spread of plant pests while still ensuring the free flow of trade between the three nations. NAPPO member countries meet regularly and APHIS employees are frequently assigned to NAPPO committees charged with reviewing technical standards or reviewing new methods for pest control. NAPPO has two committees, comprised of both government and industry officials, dedicated to addressing forestry and invasive species issues. These international and regional groups provide vital information about pest and disease situations abroad that could affect the United States.

APHIS uses information gathered through these sources to complement several other offshore activities. Risk assessments are used to make informed decisions about the potential pest or disease risks associated with commodities from specific regions of the world. APHIS grants or denies import permits for these commodities and regions accordingly.

In addition to import permits, APHIS requires shipments of approved imported commodities to be accompanied by official sanitary or phytosanitary certification, which indicates that any pest or disease risk has been sufficiently mitigated. APHIS also requires that certain approved commodities undergo and pass preclearance inspection in the country of origin before being shipped to the United States. APHIS may also require that commodities undergo treatment—such as fumigation or temperature treatments—and/or mandatory quarantine prior to being allowed entry into the United States.

### ***Port of Entry Inspection/Smuggling Interdiction and Trade Compliance***

Once shipments have passed through these overlapping offshore protections, they must be cleared upon arrival in the United States. In March of 2003, responsibility for

port inspections of agricultural commodities transferred from USDA to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Customs and Border Protection (CBP). CBP has 1,800 agricultural specialists dedicated to inspecting agricultural commodities and other products that may be harboring pests and diseases. CBP's agricultural specialists undergo eight weeks of agriculture-specific training, just as they did under APHIS, to ensure they are fully prepared for their role at the border.

Under the legislation that created the Department of Homeland Security, APHIS maintained responsibility for establishing the regulations and guidelines that govern the import of agricultural and forest products, and CBP became responsible for conducting the actual inspections at ports. APHIS uses the foreign pest and disease information gathered from the sources described earlier to establish policies and regulations that guide CBP's port inspection. APHIS also retained inspection authority for propagative plant material and has 17 plant inspection stations and a national center that carry out this function.

It's important to note that port of entry inspection is not intended to inspect every passenger and parcel that enters the country. Given the volume of cargo and passengers that enter our country each day, it is simply not possible to inspect every cargo container or traveler suitcase. Therefore, inspections target the highest-risk cargo, as well as travelers most likely to be carrying agricultural products.

APHIS and CBP, in cooperation, have developed a quality assurance program that helps ensure the highest quality of agricultural inspection at ports of entry. The quality assurance program is conducted by reviewers from both CBP and APHIS. This group visits ports of entry to examine best practices and any potential deficiencies related to agriculture inspections. The group then issues a report outlining what operations are working effectively at the port, as well as what could be improved. The quality assurance program has been successful and continues to evolve to meet the needs of both agencies.

APHIS recognizes that there is also risk posed by smuggled or improperly imported agricultural products and uses its Smuggling Interdiction and Trade Compliance (SITC) officers to address this vulnerability. APHIS' SITC program is responsible for intelligence gathering and other anti-smuggling activities, such as secondary market and warehouse inspections, that help prevent animal and plant pests and diseases from entering the United States. When SITC personnel identify smuggled product, they not only remove it from the market but also conduct a full investigation to identify and eliminate any illegal pathways at their source.

I'll give you an example of the work SITC does in response to forest pests. Less than two weeks before Christmas in 2004, SITC conducted an investigation into the detection of a brown fir longhorned beetle in an artificial Christmas tree from China. The trees were artificial but had a natural wood base that could harbor the wood-boring pests. SITC conducted a full traceback investigation that revealed the trees were being sold through 20 major distributors. More than 300,000 pounds of product were quickly recalled from the retail level and destroyed.

## *Surveillance*

As I mentioned at the outset of my testimony, APHIS works very hard to prevent invasive species from entering the United States. But, realistically we know we must have a strong domestic surveillance infrastructure in place to detect any pests that could slip past our prevention measures. GAO's report points out—and we agree—that early detection of pests is essential to preventing their establishment in the United States. Early detection of pests can help reduce the cost to industry of lost product and lost markets.

Investment in early detection can also minimize the future costs of control or eradication programs. Consequently, APHIS' pest detection budget has increased from \$6.8 million in 2002 to \$27.3 million in 2006. The President's FY 2007 budget request includes \$46.7 million for pest detection efforts.

APHIS utilizes a nationwide system of experts to track plant pests of concern. The Cooperative Agricultural Pest Survey, better known as the CAPS program, is a pest surveillance program managed cooperatively by APHIS and the State departments of agriculture. Universities, industry groups, and natural resource protection organizations are also partners in CAPS.

The primary function of the program is to survey, identify and monitor pests of concern to U.S. agriculture and the environment. Located in all 50 states and 3 territories, CAPS program personnel track more than 400 pests of concern in both rural and urban sites nationwide. APHIS develops the list of pests with input from States, Forest Service, and other stakeholders. The list includes pests that are already in the United States in limited distribution and those that are not yet here but are of concern.

In support of the CAPS program, APHIS has 26 pest survey specialists located across the country that act as liaisons between APHIS and State agencies or universities that administer the cooperative agreements. These specialists help develop the cooperative survey programs, set up survey methods to be used, and help with outreach efforts at the State and local level. We are even looking at the potential for cross-training them to act as first responders in plant pest emergency situations.

We are very proud of the CAPS program at APHIS. It has been used to forecast and provide early warning about the arrival of soybean rust, help retain markets for industry by determining the extent of diseases such as plum pox virus, and it allowed for the early detection of *Sirex noctilio*, a forest pest of pine trees discovered in New York.

Working alongside the CAPS program is our New Pest Advisory Group (NPAG). This group assesses new or potential introductions of foreign pests and recommends to APHIS an appropriate course of action. NPAG includes federal, state and university sources with regulatory and scientific expertise related to the particular pest of interest. If the group determines that the new pest is of concern, they may recommend that APHIS

gather more information through surveying or other means; take action, such as quarantine or eradication; or refer the pest to another institution, such as another Federal agency, States or industry.

### ***Emergency Response***

In conjunction with our prevention and surveillance efforts, we acknowledge the absolute necessity of being able to respond swiftly and in a coordinated manner should a serious pest or disease be detected. APHIS has the authority and the ability to respond quickly and effectively to the identification of new pests. In addition, APHIS has specific emergency response guidelines for many of the invasive pests and diseases that pose a significant threat to the United States. We've developed these response plans in conjunction with our Federal, State, and local partners and even conducted exercises to test our preparedness. To ensure maximum speed and effectiveness, we have rapid response teams stationed around the country ready to travel to detection sites to coordinate Federal containment and eradication efforts.

APHIS' emergency response efforts are guided by the President's National Response Plan (NRP), which aligns Federal coordination structures, capabilities, and resources into a unified, all-discipline, and all-hazards approach to domestic incident management. Under the NRP, resources are grouped into Emergency Support Functions that would most likely be needed during a domestic incident. USDA is the lead department for Emergency Support Function # 11, which specifically addresses the protection of agriculture and natural resources, and could include response to invasive forest pests.

APHIS, based on the model developed by the Forest Service to manage fire response efforts, has also moved to the incident command approach to emergency response. Incident command places teams of emergency personnel and managers directly in the field to coordinate response efforts. By virtue of their placement and size, the teams and their commanders have a high level of autonomy, are able to respond quickly to new or evolving situations, and can provide extremely timely information to decision makers. In addition, teams from various local, State, and Federal agencies all speak the same language when working an emergency and can tap into a wider network of resources. We frequently engage Forest Service on large-scale responses.

We also have an Emergency Operations Center located within APHIS headquarters outside of Washington, D.C. The Center is an 8,800-square-foot, state-of-the-art facility that serves as the national command center for management of APHIS emergency programs. During an emergency, it can support 65 personnel and operate 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The Center's communication capabilities include video teleconferencing, advanced computer interfaces, and Geographical Information System mapping. The Center, in combination with quick-response incident command teams, gives APHIS the tools and resources necessary to effectively coordinate and manage the comprehensive response to emergency situations that have the potential to seriously affect U.S. agriculture or the environment.

Let me provide two examples of how we've responded in real emergency situations involving forest pests.

First, let's look at *P. ramorum*. Since *P. ramorum* was first detected in forests in California in 1995, APHIS has worked closely with U.S. Forest Service and various States to determine the extent of its distribution and to try to limit its artificial spread through quarantine and public education.

Although it was initially thought to be primarily a forest pest, in 2004, *P. ramorum* was discovered in a large California nursery. APHIS mobilized a rapid response team to determine the extent of the problem through traceback and traceforward investigations. It was determined that the nursery had shipped potentially infected plants to other nurseries in 39 States. An emergency program was launched to locate and destroy potentially infected plants and survey nurseries and surrounding natural resource areas. The response effort operated out of the Emergency Operations Center, the regional offices, and on the ground in the States under the incident command structure. The emergency efforts in response to *P. ramorum* allowed APHIS to prevent the establishment of the pathogen outside of California and Oregon. APHIS also developed a strict compliance program to govern the interstate movement of nursery plants, allowing trade to resume while preventing further spread of the pathogen.

Next, when APHIS officials first realized, after the detection of Asian longhorned beetle, that wood packaging materials from China posed a pest risk, we implemented a highly successful regulatory program to shut down that pathway. We published an emergency interim rule to require treatment for wood-boring pests on all shipments containing wood packaging material from China. Options for treatment include heat-treatment, fumigation, treatment with preservatives, or replacing wood materials altogether with alternative packing materials.

When it became evident that the problems with wood packaging material were not confined to China, APHIS and its regional partners from NAPPO pushed for a more global approach. We introduced an international standard through the International Plant Protection Convention and it was adopted in March 2002. The standard sets guidelines wood packaging material in international trade. Under the guidelines, importing countries can require that packing materials be appropriately treated and marked under an official program developed and overseen by the country of export. Enforcement of this standard in the United States has been phased-in and will be fully enforced on July 5, two weeks from today. Any shipments that do not meet the requirements will be returned to the country of origin.

This looming enforcement deadline and the potential costs of having shipments reexported have provided incentive to some importers and exporters to examine other packaging materials. I visited a few ports of entry on a recent trip to Japan and witnessed several shipments packed in plastic materials, as to avoid any possible problems related to wood packaging material standards.

I understand there was not enough time to fully address this international standard for wood packaging material in the GAO report, but I believe it serves as a good example of the work APHIS does to prevent the introduction of invasive species. APHIS is committed to identifying any vulnerabilities or potential pathways for pests, and using its authority to help block those pathways.

### ***Expanding Capabilities through Partnership***

I'd like to take some time now to talk about the strong domestic partnerships APHIS has nurtured. One of the most important domestic groups that USDA contributes to is the National Invasive Species Council (NISC), which was created through an Executive Order in 1999. NISC helps plan for future challenges and coordinates prevention and response efforts across the country.

The Council, co-chaired by USDA and the Departments of Commerce and Interior, coordinates the work of involved Federal agencies, ensuring that resources are used wisely and that our experts are consulted regularly. The most important tool at the Council's disposal is its invasive species management plan. Developed and regularly fine-tuned by participating Federal agencies, the plan keeps involved officials on the same page and in contact with one another. National in scope, it is a blueprint that not only steers Federal efforts, but also helps us remain flexible and responsive to new situations.

Another partnership that has been essential to our work on invasive forest pests is obviously our relationship with the U.S. Forest Service. APHIS and Forest Service set the foundation for cooperative work many years ago with our *Slow the Spread* campaign for gypsy moth, and we continue to work together on many pests, including Asian longhorned beetle, emerald ash borer, *P. Ramorum*, *Sirex noctilio*, and a wealth of other programs. Forest Service sits on our New Pest Advisory Group and offers a critical perspective when new forest pests are identified. We also are currently working together on their non-native bark beetle survey pilot program, which they will address in greater detail.

An upcoming joint effort from APHIS and Forest Service, in conjunction with the National Invasive Species Council, is a two-day meeting in November in Washington, D.C., on invasive forest pests and forest health, as a whole. The meeting, titled *Invasive Species and Forest Health—Expanding the Team*, intends to heighten awareness of forest health issues and build a stronger network for responding to invasive species in forests. The meeting will include sessions on prevention, preparedness, response and recovery issues, as well as needs in areas such as research and development.

In addition to NISC and U.S. Forest Service, APHIS realizes that industry groups, community groups, and individual residents are some of our strongest allies. Each extra pair of eyes that can look for signs of plant-disease, strange-looking insects, or exotic weeds are an invaluable asset to our surveillance and monitoring programs. For this



reason, APHIS has conducted outreach campaigns tailored to specific audiences that may have an interest or an ability to help out.

To illustrate, I'll use the forest pests that were covered in the GAO report. The Asian longhorned beetle, with its size and distinctive markings, has lent itself to some creative outreach aimed at harnessing the curiosity and vigilance of school children. Our Beetle Busters program gets children involved in looking in their neighborhoods and school communities for signs of infestation. We've developed and distributed 800 school curriculum kits on the program to middle and high school science teachers.

To address the artificial spread of emerald ash borer through the movement of firewood, APHIS has used billboard advertising asking that campers "Pack Marshmallows, Not Firewood." A total of 380 billboards were posted on highly traveled roadways in strategic counties in Michigan, Ohio and Indiana. Also, next week, APHIS and the Ohio Department of Agriculture are hosting a bus tour of areas affected by emerald ash borer to raise awareness of the issue with local officials.

For *P. ramorum*, APHIS launched an awareness campaign targeting the extensive nursery and landscape industry that cover more than 24,000 horticultural operations across the country. We reached the industry through news articles in trade publications, advertisements, website postings, and by distributing fact sheets and brochures at industry meetings and conferences.

### ***Conclusion***

APHIS appreciates the Committee's interest in not only our programs to address invasive species, but also the challenges we regularly face. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify before the Subcommittee on behalf of APHIS. I am happy to answer any questions you might have regarding my testimony.