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Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health
United States House of Representatives

Hearing on the GAO Report on Invasive Forest Pests

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Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee. My name is Bob Slocum and I am the Executive Vice President of the North Carolina Forestry Association, a private non-profit forest conservation organization representing approximately 4,500 forest products manufacturers, landowners, forest managers, wood suppliers and others involved in the growing, harvesting, transportation and manufacture of wood and wood and paper products. Our association carries out programs in legislative and regulatory affairs, communications and education that are aimed at ensuring North Carolina's forest resources remain abundant, healthy and productive.

I am also a registered professional forester. I have served as a field forester for the Virginia Department of Forestry and in my association career worked at the state, regional and national levels. In the mid-1980's, I was vice president for private forest policy, legislation and research with the American Forest Council – now part of the American Forest and Paper Association. In that role, I was deeply involved with many USDA-Forest Service programs including cooperative fire control and forest pest management programs.

Mr. Chairman, I will offer comments on the recent GAO report on Invasive Forest Pests but first I want to touch on the importance of federal pest management and control programs and on a very important ongoing program that directly affects North Carolina – the Slow the Spread program to control gypsy moth infestations.

When I worked in DC for a national forest industry trade association, we believed that federal programs and spending focus on those activities where there is a unique federal responsibility and where the federal government, as opposed to the states or private sector, is best suited and equipped to carry out the program. Personally, I still believe that. Pest management and control is one area where there is a unique federal role as well as state and private sector roles. The focus of this hearing is on invasive pests and such pests represent a serious, and growing, threat to our forests, our environment and our economy. Wood and wood products is now a worldwide commodity and the US imports and exports wood and wood products from and to all parts of the world. Unfortunately, this worldwide trade also exposes our forests, and those of other countries, to potential threats from non-native insects and diseases. These pests often enter our country on or in imported wood or wood products that come through our ports. Once here, these pests often don't face any natural predators or other checks that would normally control outbreaks. Once established, invasive insects and diseases don't recognize property lines or state boundaries and can move quickly while causing serious economic and environmental damage. A federal role is thus critical to controlling and if possible, eradicating these invasive pests.

Now I want to touch on the existing pest control program for the gypsy moth. Gypsy moth is a destructive, exotic forest pest that was accidentally introduced into the United States in 1869. It is currently established throughout the northeast and parts of the upper mid-west (slide 1)

- It feeds on over 300 species of trees but oaks are most preferred.
- 75 million acres have been defoliated by gypsy moth since 1970.
- Gypsy moth defoliation causes extensive tree mortality, reduces property values, adversely affects commerce and causes allergic reactions in sensitive individuals that come in contact with the caterpillars.
- Most (almost 70%) of the susceptible hardwood forests in the United States have not been infested by gypsy moth and are still at risk.

Since Congress funded the Slow the Spread Program (STS) in the year 2000, ten states located along the leading edge of gypsy moth populations, in cooperation with the USDA Forest Service, have implemented a region-wide strategy to minimize the rate at which gypsy moth spreads into uninfested areas. As a direct result of this program, spread has been dramatically reduced by more than 70% from the historical level of 13 miles per year to 3 miles per year. In just 6 years, this program has prevented impacts that would have occurred on more than 40 million newly infested acres. As you can see from the slide, North Carolina is at the edge of the spread and so far, thanks to the STS program, been able to hold the moth at bay.

This slide shows why federal expenditures for this program are justified. When the Slow the Spread program was implemented, the rate of spread of gypsy moth declined dramatically. Today, that rate is about 3 miles per year compared to an historical rate of more than 20 miles per year.

The benefits and accomplishments of this program are remarkable:

- STS reduces spread of this destructive pest to 3 miles per year, which will prevent infestation of more than 150 million acres over the next 20 years (compare maps).
- STS protects the extensive urban and wildland hardwood forests in the south and upper mid-west.
- STS protects the environment through the use of gypsy moth specific treatment tactics.
- STS unifies the partners and promotes a well coordinated, region-wide action based on biological need.
- STS yields a benefit to cost ratio of more than 4 to 1 by delaying the onset of impacts that occur as gypsy moth invades new areas.

These benefits have been achieved with a partnership investment of state and federal funds averaging \$13 million each year. Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, I urge you to support maintaining the current funding level for this program and that you request the Appropriations Committee to put language in the appropriations bill directing the Forest Service to maintain current funding levels for this program. This program is a model for cooperative forest pest management and one that should be used to develop control strategies for the three invasive pests discussed in the GAO report.

The GAO report on invasive forest pests examined responses to three specific pest threats – the Asian Long Horn Beetle, the emerald ash borer and the pathogen that causes Sudden Oak Death, *phytophthora ramorum*. I agree with the purpose of the report and with its findings. While the long horn beetle, emerald ash borer and *p. ramorum* are perhaps the newest threats, they are certainly not the first and won't be the last. As the report noted, the chestnut blight that wiped out the chestnut from our eastern forests and the ongoing invasion of the gypsy moth were two of the first invasives that had serious economic and environmental impacts to our forests. Although both have been here for more than 100 years, they continue to impact our forests.

GAO's findings were significant and I want to briefly highlight the major points:

- The biology of the invasive greatly influences the potential success in control and eradication. This is, to a large degree, common sense but is still important. The gypsy moth is a good example in that the adult moth lays its eggs almost anywhere it can find cover. Cars and campers became favorite locations and enabled the infestation to spread rapidly over large areas. *P. ramorum* is a fungus that ultimately infects oaks but needs an alternate host to reproduce. The alternate hosts are more than 50 common plant genera, many of which are common ornamentals grown in nurseries. Although currently limited to the West Coast, the fungus appeared in North Carolina in 2004-2005 on ornamentals shipped from a California nursery. Luckily, the fungus was detected and it doesn't appear to have gotten out into the environment in North Carolina, but it's a good example of something that can spread great distances in a very short time.
- Delays in detection and identification allowed the three pests reviewed in the report to become established and spread before control efforts began. In each instance, several years elapsed between the arrival of the pest and its discovery, thereby giving the pest time to become firmly established in the environment. This statement is certainly true for the chestnut blight and gypsy moth, which became established more than 100 years ago, and unfortunately it is still true today.
- Quarantines have been helpful in containing human-induced spread of these forest pests. Federal and state agencies have also mounted public education campaigns to inform the public about the need to refrain from activities that could spread the pests. However, while helpful, quarantines are difficult to establish and enforce and they have not completely stopped the movement of those pests. I want to emphasize that I believe our experience in North Carolina supports this finding and also demonstrates that quarantines are an important, and effective, part of an overall control strategy.
- Efforts to address the three forest pests are limited by the lack of cost-effective technologies for eradicating them. Again, a correct finding and one that emphasizes the need for expanded research in pest management and alternative control technologies.
- While USDA has budgeted over \$420 million on control programs for these pests, program managers have told us [GAO] that funding has not been sufficient to fully implement their programs. One of the most disturbing consequences of this funding issue is the desire of the Forest Service to shift funding away from other pest control programs, such as the Slow the Spread program for gypsy moth control, and allocate to these newer pests. I urge this subcommittee to discourage such action and to highlight with the Appropriations Committees in both Houses, in the strongest terms possible, the importance of maintaining,

and expanding, funding for pest management and control programs.

Based on their findings, GAO made 3 important recommendations which should be implemented. These recommendations were:

- To expand efforts to monitor forest health conditions to include urban areas, particularly those deemed high risk for potential infestations;
- To regularly update and publish management plans for pests that include status information and funding needs; and
- To implement written procedures that broadly define when and how to operate science panels for specific pests

It was also noted in the report that port inspections, including pest inspections, have been transferred from the Department of Agriculture to Homeland Security. Such transfers, if not carefully managed, can result in serious lapses in effectiveness. I urge that this be carefully monitored to assure such lapses are minimal.

These may seem to be modest recommendations given the severity of the threat from invasive pests. However, the Forest Service and the Department of Agriculture along with Homeland Security have a substantial and effective program already in place. These recommendations will simply make it better and even more cost effective.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this report and the importance of pest management programs to our forests, our environment and our economy.