TESTIMONY OF DAVID WESLEY
DEPUTY REGIONAL DIRECTOR, PACIFIC REGION, UNITED STATES FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES CONSERVATION, WILDLIFE AND OCEANS REGARDING THE GROWING PROBLEM OF INVASIVE SPECIES IN THE HAWAIIAN ARCHIPELAGO
April 15, 2004

Mr. Chairman, good morning and thank you for the opportunity to present the Department of the Interior's (Department) views on the problem of invasive species in Hawaii. I am David Wesley, the Deputy Regional Director for the Pacific Region of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service). The Service appreciates the continued interest and commitment of this Subcommittee in addressing the increasing threat of invasive species on native species and their habitats. Invasive species are among the most significant natural resource management challenges that the Service faces when managing land and endangered species in the Hawaiian Islands.

Background on the Hawaiian Ecosystem

Rich in biodiversity, Hawaii has approximately 9,975 species that are considered endemic. At the same time, more than 5,000 species of alien plants and animals have become established in the Hawaiian Islands over the last 200 years. Of these, between roughly 300-500 are considered truly "invasive." Due in part to impacts from invasive species, more than 1,100 endemic species are now considered extinct.
The current rate of native species loss in Hawaii exceeds that of all other states in our nation. The Service recognizes 312 endangered or threatened species in the State of Hawaii, a number which represents 25 percent of all listed species in the United States. Although multiple causes contribute to the decline of these species, the introduction and establishment of invasive species is consistently shown to be a major factor. Currently, predation and competition from invasive species are the primary factors limiting recovery of most Hawaiian endangered and threatened species.

A long-term commitment to invasive species management and strong federal, state, and local partnerships are needed to ensure the biological integrity of specific sites and continued existence of many native Hawaiian species.

Cooperative Approaches in the Management of Invasive Species on Hawaii

Collaborating with federal, State, and other entities, the Service has spent approximately $2.7 million per year over the past two years in Hawaii and the Pacific on the control of invasive species. Species of concern to the Service in Hawaii include: brown treesnakes; red fire ants; the West Nile virus; the plant Miconia; and five species of marine algae. With a focus on prevention, managing these pests through a cooperative effort is critical to the Service's mission in Hawaii. We are beginning to see progress.

At Hakalau Forest National Wildlife Refuge, for example, we have been successful with localized control of invasive weeds and ungulates. Invasive species management has also been a focus for the federal, State, and private lands cooperatively managed by the Olaa-Kilauea Partnership.

As part of a $700,000 set aside for invasive species management in Hawaii, the Fish and Wildlife Service provides $400,000 per year to the statewide Coordinating Group on Alien Pest Species (CGAPS) and island-based Invasive Species Committees (ISCs). The CGAPS was formed in 1995 to bring agencies and organizations together on a Statewide level to work on invasive species prevention, early detection, and rapid response.

Partnerships like the CGAPS highlight the key elements to success in addressing these issues. Preventing the introduction and spread of new harmful non-native species is the most cost-effective long-term strategy to achieve success. Because of the complexity of such a strategy and the impact on society of many potentially harmful non-native species, we must work in cooperative partnerships with federal, State, local, and other entities to target management and prevention efforts on several specific, high-risk species while

building general capacity and experience to deal with a wide range of issues.

For example, ISCs controlled Miconia – an invasive tree native to South America – on approximately 83,681 acres throughout Hawaii during the 2003 calendar year.
Although the community-based ISCs focus efforts on the islands where they are located, the overall effect of their efforts Statewide is impressive.

Another targeted activity that benefits Hawaii is the Department's effort to control brown treesnakes in Guam. The Department provides approximately $2.3 million per year for brown treesnake interdiction, control, and research through the Office of Insular Affairs, with the fiscal year (FY) 2005 Budget proposing a $600,000 increase through the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and the Office of Insular Affairs. In addition, in order to provide regional leadership to the Brown Treesnake Control Technical Committee, the Service provides direct funding support and technical assistance to our partners.

There are clear parallels between long-term regional efforts related to brown treesnake control and more recent efforts to prevent red-imported fire ants and West Nile virus from becoming established in the State. We believe that consistent, long-term support of single species issues are essential to building general capacity related to invasive species interdiction in Hawaii.

Rapid Response and Control Methods

Many pathways continue to bring new invaders to Hawaii and the Pacific Islands, and we are working to address these issues. For example, the Service worked with the State of Hawaii through the Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force to develop a statewide Aquatic Nuisance Species Management Plan. During this fiscal year, the Service is providing funding to begin implementing that plan, which should help enhance the coordination of management efforts, identification of outstanding problems, and development of recommendations for additional actions.

Furthermore, the Service, as well as other bureaus in the Department, are working to address ballast water issues. USGS received funds in FY 2004 to determine the effectiveness of ballast water management technologies that could prove useful in determining future management efforts. The Service is also spending approximately $250,000 this year for a ballast technology demonstration program.

As part of the Hawaii state management plan, rapid response programs are also being developed. As the Service stated last summer in Congressional testimony, we believe that rapid response teams and other early detection measures are important in the battle against non-native, invasive species. Several of the Department's bureaus have developed rapid response teams, and the USGS received increased funds ($250,000) in FY 2004 for early detection and rapid response activities.

Without a rapid response method, the effects can be devastating. For example, in 1997, Coqui and greenhouse frogs were reported in seven sites on Hawaii. Subsequently, they have become widespread on the Big Island. There is currently no means to eradicate these pest frogs, and they have become established or sighted in Maui, Oahu, Kauai, and Guam. An early detection and eradication program might have been able to limit their spread.

We understand the importance of advance planning and educational outreach, but we also believe that more emphasis is needed on the development of control methods to ensure that we have adequate tools to implement control actions when deemed necessary. While other priorities and limited control options continue to present challenges, the Service and its partners are addressing these issues proactively when considering how to respond to significant invasive species problems. Without cost-effective control strategies, Hawaii and other states will continue to experience the harmful ecological and economic impacts of non-native, invasive species.

Conclusion

Because of the unique challenges with invasive species faced by the State and the experience of the Service at both the State and at the national level, we are committed to a continued dialog of lessons learned in the prevention and control of invasive species.
In closing, Mr. Chairman, I would like to say that the Service very much appreciates your interest in invasive species issues, and particularly applauds your interest in learning more about their impacts in Hawaii. Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I would be pleased to answer any questions.