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Before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Resources Subcommittees on

Fisheries, Wildlife and Oceans

National Parks, Recreation and Public Lands

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SUBJECT

Growing Problem of Invasive Species

INTRODUCTION

On behalf of the National Association of State Foresters, I am pleased that Chairman Gilchrest and Chairman Radanovich have asked us to testify on the growing problem of invasive species. NASF is a non-profit organization that represents the directors of the state forestry agencies from all fifty states, eight U.S. territories, and the District of Columbia. State Foresters manage and protect state and private forests across the U.S., which together encompass two-thirds of the nation's forests.

I am representing NASF in my role as Chairman of the Forest Health Protection Committee. Addressing the spread of invasive species is an objective of high priority for my committee, as invasive species—weeds, insects, pathogens, animals, etc.—are a growing concern among foresters and other natural resource professionals. I hope you find our comments instructive as you consider possible Congressional legislation or other federal actions to help get ahead of this ubiquitous problem.

In this testimony, I will address the topics you raised in your invitation to testify: (1) the scope of the invasive species problem; (2) current efforts to control or eradicate invasive species; (3) the adequacy of existing statutory authority to stop the expansion of invasives; and (4) our recommendations on how to stop the problem.

CLARIFICATION

Before I discuss the topics you raised, I would like to offer a point of clarification about what constitutes an invasive species.

As natural resource managers, our use of the term “invasive” is often synonymous with “exotic” or “non-native”—species that presumably originate from distant corners of the world and are transported here. Many exotic insects, plants, and animals have become

very destructive after entering the U.S. However, it is important to remember that several species indigenous to the U.S. are equally harmful to our environment and economy, as well as those of other countries. In other words, not all invasive species are exotic, and the U.S. is both a recipient and a contributor to the problem.

The red oak borer is a case in point. Populations of the native insects recently have skyrocketed in the Ozark Highlands of Arkansas, Missouri, and Oklahoma. Aging trees and overcrowded conditions due to the long term suppression of fires and the lack of active forest management, exasperated by naturally thin soils, heat waves, and droughts, have helped to create an environment for the red oak borer to thrive. In the Ozark Highlands today, as much as one million acres of dead or dying oaks pose severe wildfire hazards to

communities, drinking water supplies, and the health of forests.

Scope of Invasive Species Problem

As the Subcommittees are acutely aware, the problem of invasive species is large and growing. A recent report[1] on the status of invasive species efforts published by the Congressional Research Service (CRS) estimates that 30,000 non-native species exist across all the states and US territories. CRS also estimates that economic losses due to invasives are estimated to exceed \$123 billion annually in the U.S. The impact of invasives are tremendous, degrading the environment nationwide and affecting a range of industries including transportation, agriculture, recreation, fisheries, and others.

Forestry is no exception. From coast to coast and north to south, forests are suffering from the damaging effects of a long list of invasives: Asian longhorned beetle, gypsy moth, hemlock and balsam wooly adelgid, and other damaging insects; kudzu, privet, callery pear, and other plants; and sudden oak death, apparently caused by a pathogen. Insects, diseases, and noxious weeds especially plague forests across the nation, and aggressive efforts must be taken to keep them under control.

As an example, the wooly adelgids are wreaking havoc on forestlands on both the east and west coasts. The balsam wooly adelgid, a tiny sucking insect that was introduced (probably from Europe) to the east coast of North America about 1900, was first detected on the west coast in about 1930. It infests all true firs (trees in the genus *Abies*), but is most damaging to North American species such as Fraser fir and balsam fir in the east, and subalpine fir and Pacific silver fir in the west. In some sites, susceptible species have been wiped out. The range of subalpine fir will probably be reduced to just the highest elevations in its current range. When this insect reaches the extensive subalpine fir forests of the Rocky Mountains, it will likely dramatically change those landscapes.

In the east, the hemlock woolly adelgid is destroying streamside forests throughout the mid-Atlantic and Appalachian region, threatening water quality and sensitive aquatic species and posing a potential threat to valuable commercial timber lands in northern New England.

State Foresters, private landowners, and our partners are increasingly spending our limited money and time on controlling outbreaks of these and other invasive forest pests.

Efforts to Control or Eradicate

State Foresters are currently involved with several efforts to control or eradicate invasives. In this testimony, I would like to mention three of the most promising efforts underway: (1) National Invasive Species Council; (2) USDA Forest Service programs; and (3) 2002 Farm Bill Programs.

National Invasive Species Council

One of the most important steps made in recent years toward enhancing the capacity to control or eradicate invasive species was the creation of the National Invasive Species Council. Established through an executive order signed by President Clinton in 1999, the Council is an interagency committee gathered to develop recommendations for international cooperation, promote a network to document and monitor invasive species impacts, and encourage development of an information sharing system on invasives.

In January of 2001, the National Invasive Species Council released Meeting the Invasive Species Challenge,[2] a national invasive species management plan that represents the first major federal attempt to coordinate invasive species actions across government agencies. The plan calls for several areas of emphasis for invasive species management that should be part of any comprehensive effort to address the problem: (1) prevention; (2) early detection and rapid response; and (3) control and management. The plan includes the recommendation that draft legislation be developed to authorize matching funds for states to manage invasive species and to control invasives on state or private lands with the consent of the owner, a prospect that NASF highly endorses and hopes the Subcommittees will consider.

USDA Forest Service Programs

The USDA Forest Service State and Private Forestry (S&PF) Deputy Area has several programs that assist landowners with invasive species management, especially those within the Forest Health Protection unit. As authorized by the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act of 1978, and amended in 1990, the State Foresters deliver S&PF programs to provide cost-share funding and technical assistance to private landowners. The

broad authority of the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act can provide the infrastructure to jumpstart any new invasive species management programs that the Subcommittees may propose.

Through its three program areas (Federal Lands, Cooperative Lands, and the proposed Emerging Pest and Pathogen program), Forest Health Protection provides an important foundation for managing insect and disease outbreaks by reporting on forest health trends, surveying and monitoring, supporting the delivery of technical assistance, and providing prevention and suppression activities. In our FY 04 budget recommendations,[3] NASF encouraged Congress to include targeted funding under Forest Health Protection for the President's Healthy Forests Initiative to address the southern pine beetle infestation, which is reaching epidemic proportions. Also in FY 04, the Forest Stewardship Program has some funding for competitive grants for the purpose of improving forest health by treating invasive insects, diseases, and plants on state and private forestlands.

Invasive species management is also important to the Forest Service's other Deputy Areas, including the National Forest System and Research and Development. These well-established programs need sufficient funding to effectively address invasive species over the long term. Again I would point you to NASF's House Appropriations testimony for our FY 04 budget recommendations.

The Forest Service also works closely with the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) to detect and rapidly respond to exotic pests that threaten agricultural crops and natural habitats. A 1997 General Accounting Office report[4] suggests that despite increases in funding, staffing, and the use of technology, APHIS is having difficulty keeping up with the increased inspections accompanying increases in trade.

2002 Farm Bill Programs

The 2002 Farm Bill made substantial gains for invasive species management for forestry through authorizing the Forest Land Enhancement Program and the Community and Private Lands Fire Assistance program.

Replacing the Stewardship Incentives Program and Forestry Incentives Program, the Forest Land Enhancement Program (FLEP) provides education, technical assistance, and cost-share funding to private forest landowners. FLEP is designed to keep priorities flexible at the state level as much as possible, with priorities determined with input by State Forest Stewardship Committees. The program can be used for a variety of forestry assistance purposes, including the control, detection, monitoring, and prevention of the spread of invasive species and pests, as well as the restoration of ecosystems altered by invasives. The State Foresters hold great promise for FLEP in terms of landowner assistance, but it must be recognized that invasive species management is only one of many activities that the program supports.

The Community and Private Lands Fire Assistance program, authorized but not funded in the 2002 Farm Bill, will also address the need to control noxious weeds and other invasive species within areas burned by wildfire. Without controlling noxious weeds that invade recently burned lands, areas damaged by fire can become significant sources for the further dispersal of weeds to other areas.

adequacy OF EXISTING STATUTORY AUTHORITY

Although numerous existing federal statutes or authorities address invasive species, there remain large gaps in law. The publication, Meeting the Invasive Species Challenge, described above, includes a partial list of 40 legal authorities of the U.S. Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, and the Interior, as well as the Environmental Protection Agency and other federal agencies (see Appendix 3, pp. 62-70). Although work done under these authorities may limit such introductions, many laws do not directly address invasive species control and prevention, and those that do generally target one species that has become problematic. To my knowledge, the U.S. lacks a comprehensive approach to address invasive species, one that makes use of effective partnerships between all levels of government in all regions to identify and quickly respond to threats early (before they become a problem), effectively control outbreaks when they occur, and restore damaged ecosystems.

According to the CRS report mentioned earlier, comprehensive legislation on the treatment of non-native species has never been enacted, and no single law provides coordination among federal agencies. The National Invasive Species Council may have made some headway in regard to coordination, but its management plan also noted the need to develop legislative proposals to fill gaps in current law. Meeting the Invasive Species Challenge specifically explains that current law does not clearly address the prevention of biological invasion across foreseeable pathways, nor does it provide explicit direction on management

during the critical period between the introduction of a new non-native species and the time the species becomes established, when focus must shift from prevention to control.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The development of a comprehensive legislative package to help State Foresters and other resource managers aggressively tackle invasive species issues will be key to addressing invasive species over the long term. I hope you will keep the following principles in mind as you consider developing any such proposals.

Active Forest Management

Emphasis must be placed on active forest management. When the problem is compelling and the solution is clear, management needs to happen as soon as possible. Some research is needed, but the overall emphasis should be on doing something on the ground where and when the problems occur.

Early Detection and Rapid Response

The early detection, control, and prevention of damaging invasive species is critical to the health of forests on all ownerships. The broad range of sectors that contribute to the propagation and spread of invasive species hold the promise for innovative and incentive-driven solutions. Constituents from these sectors should be at the table in developing solutions.

Existing successful programs may serve as models for early detection and rapid response. For example, the CRS publication noted above suggests that the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC), of which the State Foresters are a key cooperator, could be a model for Congress to consider when developing rapid response programs. Efforts to quickly respond to wildfires face many of the same challenges of haste, technical needs, and interagency and intergovernmental coordination as do rapid responses to invasive species outbreaks.

A Pathways Approach

Invasive species management should focus on the variety of pathways by which invasive species enter the U.S. We need to identify and build capacity to respond, such as through early detection at ports or other shipping facilities. For example, through early detection measures targeting solid wood packing materials at ports, we might have avoided the spread of the Asian longhorned beetle to the U.S.

Long-term Investment

Long term programs with ongoing funding are needed if we are to successfully control, mitigate, and eradicate harmful nonnative species on public and private lands. This is due to both the extended survival or dormancy of seeds and the continuous threat of new species introductions from overseas.

State/Federal Partnerships

Effective partnerships between various levels of government, especially between state and federal agencies, will be critical to promptly dealing with invasive species issues. In guidelines recently adopted by the Invasive Species Advisory Committee, an advisory committee that supports the National Invasive Species Council, the group makes clear that effective partnerships among all levels of government are important first steps to building our capacity to control and eradicate invasive species across the country. The document, Guidelines and Strategies for a Successful State Federal/State Partnership to Combat Invasive Species, was adopted by the committee during its most recent meeting.

The advisory committee will be recommending that the Council use the following guidelines when developing administrative proposals or commenting on Congressional legislation for partnerships between federal and state agencies:

- Ø Incentive-driven with the voluntary cooperation of the private sector
- Ø Flexible enough to address agency and community needs at the local level
- Ø Support the development of state-level invasive species management plans

- Ø Rapidly respond to priority invasive species that could spread
- Ø Share successful invasive species management techniques among states and regions
- Ø Increase public support and understanding of invasive species issues

CONCLUSION

Invasive species management on all lands will be strengthened through integrated, results-oriented work. Where program areas overlap, limited federal dollars can be spent most effectively on integrating new and existing programs, and making use of the experts who are already involved with established authorities. By bolstering existing programs as much as developing new ones, a comprehensive package can provide an ideal opportunity to effectively address invasive species in a multi-ownership landscape.

NASF looks forward to the opportunity to work with the Subcommittees to develop and carry out effective, comprehensive programs to address the spread and control of invasive species. We are willing to help draft legislation to address these issues.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony and answer your questions today.

[1] Corn, L.M., E.H. Buck, J. Rawson, A. Segarra, and E. Fischer. 2002. Invasive Non-Native Species: Background and Issues for Congress. Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress. Nov. 29.

[2] Available at <http://www.invasivespecies.gov/council/nmp.shtml>.

[3] Our testimony before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior and Related Agencies, which includes our FY 04 recommendations, can be accessed at <http://www.stateforesters.org/>

[4] Agricultural Inspection: Improvements Needed to Minimize Threat of Foreign Pests and Diseases. GAO/RECD-97-102