

July 19, 2001

Statement of
Senator Robert F. Bennett
before the
United States House of Representatives Committee on Resources
Subcommittee on National Parks, Public Lands, and Recreation regarding
the infestation of Mormon crickets and grasshoppers in Utah

Good Morning. I thank the Chairman for holding this critically important hearing today on the current crisis the people of Utah are facing from the infestation of Mormon crickets and grasshoppers throughout significant portions of the state. I appreciate the committee giving me the opportunity to speak on this issue. I also would like to thank Mayor Anderson of Oak City and his wife , Darrell Johnson of Rush Valley, and Utah's Commissioner of Food and Agriculture Cary Peterson for traveling to Washington to share their experiences and insights with the Congress on this grave situation.

Approximately 1.5 million acres of land in 18 counties are being impacted by this year's infestation of crickets and grasshoppers, most of them severely. It is estimated that this will be the worst infestation since the 1940's and damage to crops and property will reach \$25 million. Thousands upon thousands of acres of crops and pasture have been decimated by these two inch long insects which are capable of consuming 38 pounds of vegetation over their limited life span. Not only are the crickets physically destructive they are also having a psychological impact on the residents of Utah. Children are afraid to go out and play and people are concerned about public health and safety. The Utah Department of Transportation has even been requested to determine if the crickets and grasshoppers are creating a problem on the roads.

Unfortunately, we are reaching the stage in the life cycle of these insects when they have begun to lay their eggs. At this point, it seems all we can do is to pray for a very long cold winter that will hopefully kill most of the eggs in the ground. There is, however, something the federal land management agencies can do to prepare for next year. In past years, a lack of funding has been blamed, and rightly so, for limiting the control efforts of APHIS, BLM, and the USFS. This past Tuesday, I secured \$4 million for APHIS to combat this problem next year in Utah and other affected states. I fully expect that this money will be released to APHIS in a timely manner so that it will be able to prepare for spring and summer 2002 during autumn and winter 2001. Additionally, I would like the USFS and the BLM, whom I have great respect for and a very solid working relationship with, to understand my expectations for next year. I believe Utah's land management agencies were caught flat-footed this year. I am greatly disappointed with their response to threatened lawsuits by some of Utah's out-of-touch environmental groups. I believe the BLM and USFS should begin as soon as practicable any environmental documentation and the required public participation necessary to take appropriate control measures against crickets and grasshoppers. We cannot have a repeat of 2001, it is simply unacceptable.

Again, I thank the chairman and Committee on Resources for holding today's hearings.

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