

**Statement of
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**Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans; Forests and Forest
Health; and National Parks, Recreation and Public Lands
Committee on Resources
United States House of Representatives
on
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Concerning

H.R. 3558 – Species Protection and Conservation of the Environment Act

To the Chairmen and members of the subcommittees, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am Janette Kaiser, Acting Associate Deputy Chief, National Forest System, USDA Forest Service. My comments today represent the views of USDA on H.R. 3558, the Species Protection and Conservation of the Environment Act.

First, I would like to commend the subcommittees for recognizing harmful nonnative invasive species as a significant threat to our nation's ecosystem health. Nonnative invasive species alter ecosystem functions and reduce biological diversity by eliminating native species, which in turn can lower the water table, increase soil erosion and runoff, or increase fire frequency and intensity. Nonnative invasive species also change the plant community used by domestic livestock, wildlife, and recreationists. These changes in the ecosystem often result in eliminating or restricting the use of our wildlands and urban areas and increase management costs. Populations of nonnative invasive species in the U.S. are expanding annually by 7 to 14 percent. We face a daunting challenge in managing nonnative invasive species, but the Department is

committed to working with the Administration and the Congress to identify solutions. USDA is in a strong position to address this issue because of the broad authorities supporting nonnative invasive species management. Various field operations in the Department include prevention, detection, control, monitoring and restoration; research and technology development; technical assistance to States, Tribes and private landowners; financial assistance including cooperative agreements and grants; and international collaboration.

Although USDA supports the objectives of H.R. 3558 to address the problem of nonnative invasive species, we do however have concerns. The Department has numerous programs and delivery systems already in place under existing statutory authorities to address nonnative invasive species management. Within the Forest Service in particular, there is a full range of existing authorities to support an integrated program of research and development, management of nonnative invasive species on public land, and technical assistance to private landowners. These programs focus on invasive insects such as the Asian longhorn beetle and Gypsy Moth, invasive pathogens such as Sudden Oak Death Disease, and invasive plants that grow after a fire such as starthistle. The programs that are implemented on National Forest System lands emphasize management of nonnative invasive species, the same focus areas that are in H.R. 3558.

For reasons I will detail in my testimony, USDA strongly supports the concept of controlling nonnative invasive species at the local level with support provided by a multitude of partners. However, H.R. 3558 raises a number of questions for USDA. The Department would like to engage the Committee in more detail regarding (1) compatibility with existing authorities in USDA; (2) implementation and accountability; (3) and establishment of demonstration projects.

Compatibility with Existing Authorities in USDA

Currently, within USDA there are six agencies that have a leadership role in dealing with the introduction and spread of nonnative invasive species and are involved in research, regulation, operations, partnerships, technical and financial assistance, and education. USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) is the front line of prevention, dealing with interdiction at borders, interstate movement, detecting and mitigating disseminations, and providing eradication of new introductions. The USDA research

agencies, the Agricultural Research Service, the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service, and the Forest Service, provide information on the basic ecology of nonnative invasive species, as well as detection, monitoring and control methodologies and technologies. The Forest Service has a broad range of authorities to address the nonnative invasive species issue and to coordinate with other Federal agencies with corresponding responsibilities.

Forest Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, APHIS and Farm Services Administration provide technical and financial assistance, consultation, technology transfer prevention, and landscape restoration following an invasion or to prevent an invasion following a disaster. The nonnative invasive species programs in these agencies run both independently and collaboratively.

The National Invasive Species Council that was created by Executive Order 13112 is an example of a collaborative effort among federal agencies. The Council is an inter-Departmental Council, co-chaired by the Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, and the Interior. Another program involving federal agencies is the “Pulling Together Initiative Steering Committee” sponsored by the Federal Interagency Committee for Management of Noxious and Exotic Weeds (FICMNEW). The Pulling Together Partnership Initiative has been ongoing since 1996, and is a multi-agency effort that provides federal matching grants through the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation for local and regional weed prevention and control projects. Federal agencies involved include the FS, BLM, FWS, Bureau of Reclamation, NPS, Department of Defense, and APHIS. Funds allocated from agencies involved with the Council or FICMNEW could be affected by funding allocated for H.R. 3558.

Implementation and Accountability

Section 5 of H.R. 3558 provides that a qualified project must be conducted on lands or waters under the control of the eligible applicant, and on adjacent lands or waters of a Federal agency. The bill should be clarified to provide that the Federal agency must approve any qualified project on land under its jurisdiction. The Department believes these decisions should remain within the jurisdiction of Federal land managers.

Section 5 of H.R. 3558 establishes two programs and a demonstration project for the Fish and Wildlife Service in the Department of the Interior, which can be enhanced by current programs in USDA, thus avoiding any potential redundancy.

USDA also notes two aspects of administration in Section 4, 5, and 9 of H.R. 3558 for which it would be helpful to have more information. First, H.R. 3558 delegates the coordination of projects to the Invasive Species Council; however, Council staff is not involved in program administration. Second, H.R. 3558 allocates five percent of the funding for administrative expenses. USDA is concerned whether this applies to the preparation of an environmental document, as the percentage may not be sufficient for what is needed to conduct an environmental analysis.

Establishment of Demonstration Projects

H.R. 3558 addresses the implementation of demonstration projects on National Wildlife Refuge System lands. The Department believes National Forest System lands could also serve as a site for a demonstration project to conduct field tests and demonstrate applied research activities, which are vital components and essential for success of management goals. USDA has found that research and technology development is critical to successful land management, including cooperative efforts with State and local partners.

Similarly, restoration actions following nonnative invasive species treatment are often key to sustaining control and ecosystem health over the long-term. Options are needed for supporting applied field tests, technology development and restoration actions, when these are essential components of an effective on-the-ground management strategy. The Forest Service National Forest System, Research and Development, and State and Private Forestry mission areas could implement a demonstration project.

In conclusion, nonnative invasive species threaten forest and rangeland sustainability and ecosystem viability. Although there are points of concern related to this bill, the Department believes this bill is a commendable effort to address nonnative invasive species management on public and private lands. The Department would like to work with the Committee to review existing authorities and determine if there is a

need to amend those authorities.

This concludes my testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.