

# Committee on Resources

## Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands

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### Testimony

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STATEMENT OF  
THE AMERICAN FARM BUREAU FEDERATION  
TO THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS AND PUBLIC LANDS  
HOUSE RESOURCES COMMITTEE  
REGARDING NOXIOUS WEEDS AND INVASIVE PLANTS

Presented by  
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On behalf of the American Farm Bureau Federation, (AFBF) I want to thank the subcommittee for providing us this opportunity to testify on this important issue. I am Roger Bill Mitchell, President of the Colorado Farm Bureau. I manage Mitchell Farms, a family partnership that raises potatoes and malting barley. The American Farm Bureau Federation represents over 4.8 million member families in the United States and Puerto Rico. Our members produce every commodity grown in America.

Noxious weed species have been described as ecological time bombs, botanical barbarians, silent invaders, and an explosion in slow motion.

As America's largest agricultural organization, AFBF is highly sensitive to the fact that our nation's cropland, forests and rangeland need protection from noxious weed species. The estimated annual loss of productivity caused by noxious weeds for 64 crops grown in the U. S. is \$7.4 billion.

For this reason, AFBF was one of the early signatories to "Pulling Together: A National Strategy for Management of Invasive Plants". AFBF also serves on the steering committee for the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's "Pulling Together Initiative."

Most of our concern, however, is directed to the problem of noxious weeds in the "public land" states. Farm Bureau policy calls for legislation to require the federal government to manage its lands so that no harm is done to adjoining land, crops, and animals. We support congressional appropriations for noxious weed control on public lands commensurate with the magnitude of the problem.

The problem is easily described. Noxious weed species can quickly become a monoculture that deprives federal and private rangeland of desired biological diversity. Plants and wildlife alike are adversely impacted. Some noxious weeds can be toxic to livestock and game animals. They can interfere with properly functioning watersheds, resulting in erosion and loss of water storage capacity. Noxious weeds can change soil temperatures and can serve as fuel for rangeland wildfires. Control of noxious weeds is truly an issue on which everyone can agree.

The most alarming aspect of our nation's battle against aggressive plant invaders is that we are losing this war. Every agency report and scientific study confirms the fact that noxious weeds are spreading quickly, with many infestations out of control. This is particularly true in the public land states. These states are characterized by less cultivation, crazy-quilt land ownership patterns with the federal government being the dominant landowner, fewer fences, dramatic changes in elevation with the federal government usually owning the land in the upper watershed areas, and relatively wide-ranging movement by both domestic livestock and wildlife.

A February 1999 report from the Idaho Department of Agriculture graphically dramatizes the nature and extent of the problem. It states, "Although the exact acreage is unknown, it is estimated that over 8 million acres of Idaho lands are

severely infested by one of the state-designated 35 noxious weeds. In 1963, one rangeland weed, rush skeletonweed, occupied approximately 40 acres near Banks, Idaho. Today it is found across four million acres and continues to spread. Yellow starthistle has increased from a few acres in 1955 to nearly 500,000 acres. Left unchecked, noxious weeds can spread at a surprising rate of fourteen percent per year."

According to a recent Department of the Interior survey, noxious weeds are invading western wildlands at a rate conservatively estimated to be nearly 5,000 acres a day. Other reports indicate that by the year 2010 there could be 140 million acres of federal land infested by noxious weeds, increases of 20 million acres annually, a 25 percent decrease in livestock forage and wildlife habitat, vegetation changes on wetlands and waterways, and weed management would be the single largest item in our nation's land management budget.

Ranchers, conservationists, state fish and game officials, and federal land managers in the public land states have been attempting to confront the problem. For example, of the 230 funding requests received over the past three years by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation for invasive weed programs, 175 or 76 percent were submitted by entities in public land states. The vast majority of these addressed noxious weed infestations on federal lands.

A typical project submitted to the Foundation for funding would contain the following elements: (1) cooperating partners including ranchers, conservationists and state and federal agencies who organize a Weed Management Area; (2) written objectives focusing on weed eradication and containment, restoration of native plant communities, protection of endangered species habitat and protection of riparian areas; (3) an integrated approach to implementation; and (4) public education and outreach. Amounts being requested range from \$5,000 to well over \$100,000. Because of limited funding, not all requests are met. Many projects that receive funding are not granted all that they request.

Since 1997, the Foundation has supported nine different noxious weed projects in sections of my home state of Colorado, including the San Luis Valley where I farm. Locally derived funding of \$396,325 has been matched by federal funding of \$250,550 for a total of \$646,875. A significant percentage of the local match comes from the State of Colorado, which has had an annual appropriation of \$225,000 for noxious weed management. Our state requires all counties and municipalities to organize noxious weed advisory boards, identify the weeds to be managed, and carry out a management program. We also operate under a memorandum of understanding with the appropriate federal agencies for purposes of cooperation and coordination.

In closing, I'd like to point out the differences in productivity between rangelands infested with invasive weeds and those weed-free, and their socioeconomic implications. An example was succinctly described by the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation in its July/August, 1998 "Bugle:"

"In 1987, University of Montana researchers examined the impacts of spotted knapweed on seven western Montana cattle ranches. On one ranch, after ranchers killed knapweed with herbicide, the grass increased from 48 pounds per acre to 1,620 pounds, improving the land's carrying capacity for cattle twentyfold and boosting the value of the property. In times of low cattle prices and high demand for country homes, loss of forage from noxious weeds can be the impetus compelling ranchers to sell out and chop the land into 20-acre rectangles."

We look forward to working with the Resources Committee and appropriate federal agencies to protect our nation's public and private land.

Clearly, the time for aggressive action to combat the noxious weed problem is now. We must all work together to bring this situation under control. Money spent now to address this problem will result in savings many times over. Congress must act to solve this problem.

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