



Testimony of Dr. Ned Norris, Jr.
Chairman of the Tohono O'odham Nation
Before the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands
Committee on Natural Resources
United States House of Representatives
Congressional Field Hearings
April 10, 2010

**Testimony of Dr. Ned Norris, Jr.,
Chairman of the Tohono O’odham Nation
Regarding the invasion of buffelgrass on the Tohono O’odham Nation**

Good morning, my name is Dr. Ned Norris, Jr. and I am the Chairman of the Tohono O’odham Nation. Today, the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands has invited me to testify about the invasion of buffelgrass on the Tohono O’odham Nation. The Tohono O’odham Nation is a federally recognized tribe located in southwestern Arizona.

Buffelgrass was introduced to the Nation in the 1980s for cattle forage and erosion control. Since then, buffelgrass has spread and established itself over a large portion of the Nation.

The buffelgrass problem on the Nation is being compounded by an increasing number of wildland fires. In the past five years, the Nation has experienced more frequent wildland fires, which are partially fueled by buffelgrass. Unfortunately, these fires have largely hit the biologically diverse mountain ranges of the Nation. These fires set the stage for further buffelgrass establishment in our most important lands.

For example, the Three Peaks Fire in November, 2009, consumed 5,700 acres of Tohono O’odham Nation land, Arizona state land, and Bureau of Land Management federal land in the Baboquivari Mountains. It is estimated that 8-10% of the fuel for that fire was from buffelgrass. The Baboquivari mountains are culturally important to the O’odham and this fire will open the door for further buffelgrass invasion on these mountains. Additionally, the San Juan Fire in July, 2009, consumed 9,000 acres of Tohono O’odham Nation land and set the stage for buffelgrass establishment further upslope on the Quinlan Mountains, which are adjacent to the Baboquivari range.

Buffelgrass threatens the landscape that forms O’odham culture and puts at risk species such as saguaro, beargrass, and the Sonoran Desert Tortoise. Cultural sites are also at risk due to buffelgrass establishment. The O’odham use saguaro and beargrass for cultural purposes and the threat that buffelgrass poses – to turn the Sonoran desert into a flammable, Africanized grassland – threatens the O’odham way of life.

Although the true extent of buffelgrass on the Nation is not currently known, we are currently working with the Southern Arizona Buffelgrass Coordination Center to map the extent of invasion. This will help us to prioritize areas in need of treatment. However, the Nation needs funding in order to treat the prioritized areas. The Tohono O’odham Nation has hosted local buffelgrass removal events. However, the federal government needs to reach out to a wider range of governments, groups and institutions in order to mitigate the spread of buffelgrass in southern Arizona. Buffelgrass needs to be treated on surrounding federal lands and funds need to be provided to help local governments fight buffelgrass invasion. We must mitigate the buffelgrass problem, to ensure the O’odham way of life for generations to come.

In conclusion, we ask the Committee to consider assisting southern Arizona in its fight against buffelgrass, to preserve the Sonoran desert for future generations.