

STATEMENT OF  
CONGRESSMAN JON C. PORTER (R-NV-3)

Before the  
House Resources Subcommittee on National Parks Subcommittee

Concerning  
H.R. 4294, Natural Resource Protection Cooperative Agreement Act

March 30, 2006

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, I want to thank you for holding this hearing today on H.R. 4294, The Natural Resource Protection Cooperative Agreement Act. Also, I would like to thank the National Parks Service for their strong support of and assistance with this legislation. Finally, I would like to highlight the efforts of Mrs. Ann Schreiber of the Muddy River Regional Environmental Impact Alleviation Committee and thank her for her untiring commitment to Nevada's rural communities of Moapa, Overton, and Logandale and her successful eradication of Tamarisk (salt cedar) and other invasive species.

Protecting our nation's natural resources is one of the greatest gifts we can give to future generations. When one thinks of our national resources, images of Yellowstone National Park, Grand Canyon National Park or Lake Mead National Recreation Area often come to mind. In recent years, however, all of these areas have experienced the devastating effects of invasive plant species such as salt cedar, or tamarisk.

As the law currently exists, the National Park Service does not have the legal authority to enter into cooperative agreements. My bill will give this agency authority to enter into cooperative agreements with neighboring state, local, or Tribal governments, or other public entities, educational institutions, private landowners, and interested non-profit organizations for the purpose of resource protection. These cooperative agreements would be used to better protect our nation's natural resources by allowing the groups to work with the National Park Service for preservation, conservation, and restoration of our lands.

The National Park Service currently manages 388 units, comprised of 84.4 million acres of land throughout the United States. Of these units, 196 have been cited as having "serious problems" due to invasive plant species. In Southern Nevada, tamarisk is starting to take over many of Lake Mead's marinas, shorelines, and watersheds, greatly reducing the amount of water available for wildlife, our residents and our tourists from around the world.

According to the National Park Service, a single tamarisk plant can use up to 300 gallons of water per day. This "water thief" is tearing through Western regions and consuming enough water for 20 million people or one million acres of irrigated farmland. In a single year, anywhere from 2-4.5 million acre feet of water per year is lost due to this and other invasive species.

The immediate benefit of passage of my bill would enable National Park Service to play an active role in the Cooperative Weed Management Areas group which facilitates and coordinates weed management activities on a local basis. Already, the National Park Service has organized 16 Exotic Plant Management Team programs to develop expertise and capacity to successfully control and manage invasive weeds in National Park Units throughout the country. If passed, my bill would allow these teams to begin assisting other agencies and adjacent lands to park units, thereby increasing efficiency of weed treatment and reducing infrastructure for weed management.

Finally, I would like to highlight the efforts of a community organization in the rural area of my District. Since 1994, Mrs. Ann Schreiber with the Muddy River Regional Environment Impact Alleviation Committee (MRREIAC) has successfully worked to remove 140 acres of tamarisk on land within the rural areas of Moapa, Overton, and Logandale. Due to her efforts and the assistance of prison inmates from the Indian Springs Correctional Facility, the spring waters of the Muddy River have returned, many homes were spared during the 2005 Overton Floods, and homes continue to remain safe from wildfires prevalent in that area because the tamarisk no longer consumes the region. As the slides indicate, the transformation of that area is amazing.

Again, Mr. Chairman, I appreciate your time for this hearing and your support for expediting this legislation for addition to the Suspension calendar in the very near future.

I would also like to note my support for the amendment requested by the National Park Service that would include the language "federal agencies" in Section 2(a) as one of the groupings authorized to enter into cooperative agreements.

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