

# **Committee on Resources, Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation, & Public Lands**

[parks](#) - - Rep. Joel Hefley, Chairman

U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C. 20515-6207 - - (202) 226-7736

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## **Witness Statement**

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**Testimony By  
Dr. Terry Z. Riley, Director of Conservation  
Wildlife Management Institute  
before the  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation and Public Lands  
Committee on Resources  
Washington, D.C. 20515  
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### ***Introduction***

Mr. Chairman, I am Terry Z. Riley, Director of Conservation for the Wildlife Management Institute. The Wildlife Management Institute (WMI), established in 1911, is staffed by professional wildlife scientists and managers. Its purpose is to promote the restoration and improved management of wildlife and other natural resources in North America.

WMI commends the Committee for initiating this dialog. The seriousness of the invasive weeds issue cannot be overstated, and we urge the Committee to lay the groundwork today that will lead to a plan for long-term control of invasive weeds across the US.

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to offer our insights. The debate that will occur on invasive weeds is not an either-or proposition. The economic viability of farms and ranches is dependent on a national, coordinated effort to control the spread of weeds. Production of wildlife, agricultural crops and livestock already have been compromised, and farmers and ranchers are losing billions of dollars each year to weeds. Credible evidence exists that the cost of invasive weeds on our Nation's economy is at least \$130 billion per year.

We are deeply concerned about the accelerating spread of invasive exotic plants, or "weeds", on public and private land. Some estimates indicate that exotic invasive plants are overtaking our Nation's native vegetation at a rate of about 10,000 acres per day. Infestations are reducing the productivity and biodiversity of our Nation's natural resources at a dramatic rate. For example, research shows that weed populations frequently reduce livestock carrying capacity between 35 and 90 percent. These infestations also are increasing the predicament for threatened and endangered species and the likelihood that additional species will warrant listing under the Endangered Species Act. Furthermore, weeds increase erosion, reduce water quality and quantity and reduce natural regeneration of our Nation's prairies, shrublands and forests.

These non-native invasive plants arrive here from other countries without the natural insects, diseases and pathogens that kept them in balance with other plants in their country of origin. Consequently, these plants aggressively out-compete our native wildland plant communities. The following examples of increased weed populations on private, state, and federal wildlands illustrate the devastation underway: In Montana spotted knapweed increased from a few plants in 1920 to 5 million acres today; in Idaho rush skeleton weed from a few plants in 1954 to 4 million acres today; in Northern California yellow starthistle from 1 million acres in 1981 to about 15 million acres today. Since these weed populations increase at about 14% per year,

they continue to increase - at an increasing rate. Consequently, thousands of watersheds on public and private land are undergoing the greatest permanent degradation in their recorded history--with wildlife habitat and livestock forage suffering the greatest losses.

Local cooperative approaches offer the best opportunity to prevent and control weeds within a specific watershed. In a few states, Weed Cooperatives or County Weed Boards are bringing land owners and operators, utility companies, county and state road departments, state fish and wildlife agencies, federal land management agencies, businesses, nonprofit conservation organizations and public land users together to attack this insidious plague of weeds. Federal funds through the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's "Pulling Together Initiative" already are providing these local cooperatives with the funds they need to develop and implement long-term plans to control invasive weeds within local watersheds. One-hundred and eighty weed control cooperatives have been supported by the "Pulling Together Initiative" since 1998, however, another 247 weed cooperatives submitted projects proposals to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation that went unfunded because of insufficient funds. A wide array of partners associated with these projects have contributed millions of dollars to these cooperative weed-control ventures, leveraging 1.8 non-federal dollars for each federal dollar committed to the program. The Wildlife Management Institute has been the grantee on one of these "Pulling Together" projects since 1998 that brought together 14 federal, state, county and private partners to collectively control the spread of purple loosestrife up the Missouri River and its tributaries in Nebraska and South Dakota. These diverse groups come together enthusiastically to fight a common enemy. Unfortunately, in most areas and in most watersheds, these cooperative efforts to control and eradicate weeds are not yet in place, or have not been able to secure funding.

The technology is available to cooperatively bring the spread of invasive weeds down over the long term to a level approximating "no net increase"; along with making good progress at controlling and restoring some large infestations. However, the cost to apply this technology will not come cheaply. Without substantial federal funding over several years that can be used to leverage state and private funds, many more vast areas will become permanently degraded as these invasive weeds spread across our landscape.

Only now are we beginning to see the danger that lies ahead. There is great economic efficiency in increasing investments now to keep relatively healthy watersheds from becoming severely infested by weeds. Enormous increases in investments will be needed to restore land once it is seriously infested. With prompt action now these disasters can economically and efficiently be avoided.

Last year, our nation experienced some of the most devastating wildfires we have seen in some time; burning over 6 million acres and destroying immense amounts of public and private property. While most of those fires were ignited naturally by lightning strikes, the fuels that carried those fires often were invasive weeds, such as cheatgrass, that have invaded millions of acres of our western rangelands.

Congress immediately responded to these disasters by allocating nearly 2 billion dollars in FY 2001 to aggressively deal with the wildfire hazards across the country on public and private land. While exotic invasive weeds do not destroy homes like catastrophic wildfires did last year, and thus do not receive the interest of the Press, they are doing just as much if not more damage to the lives and livelihood of farmers and ranchers over a much larger area than wildfires.

House Bill 1462, the "Harmful Nonnative Weed Control Act of 2001" is a good first step at addressing the invasive weeds, but we believe it does not go far enough. Our concerns related to HR 1462 include:

- Sufficient and long-term funding on public and private land;
- A watershed-based approach to controlling weeds;
- Coordinated weed control projects on public and private lands;
- Assurances that all nonnative invasive weeds are addressed;
- Requirements to leverage non-federal funds;
- Opportunities to fund multi state weed control projects; and

- The future of the NFWF's Pulling Together Initiative.

### ***Recommendation***

We strongly urge the Committee to address the issue of annual and long-term funding needed to control invasive nonnative weeds on our Nation's public and private lands. Local cooperative efforts to control invasive nonnative weeds must have some assurances that funding will be available to help plan and implement their programs. Federal land management agencies also must have the funds to control weeds on our public lands, and there must be methods developed to ensure coordination between weed control efforts on public and adjacent private lands. We strongly urge the Committee to allocate at least \$100,000,000 per year for nonnative invasive weed control projects on private land, and to commit at least 5 years of funding.

We also urge the Committee to allocate sufficient funds to the federal land management agencies to control noxious weeds on public lands. For example, the Bureau of Land Management needs at least \$15 million in FY 2002 to implement their weed control program, and they will need at least \$30 million per year once the program is fully implemented. Congress provided \$8 million in FY 2001 to the USDA Forest Service to control invasive weeds on 150,000 acres, but already there are over 8 million acres of the agencies' 192 million acres that are infested by nonnative invasive weeds. Much more funding is needed to stop the spread of weeds on federal land. If they are not stopped, the consequences will be extremely expensive and tragic.

We are concerned that H.R. 1462 will reduce funding for other natural resource programs within the Department of the Interior (DOI). Since funding for H.R. 1462 has not been clearly identified in the text of the bill (specifically referred to as Section 11 in the bill), we believe H.R. 1462 will require the Secretary of the Interior to cut funding for other programs in order to meet the requirements in H.R. 1462. We urge the Committee to clearly identify the funding necessary to implement an effective weed control program, but not at the cost of other natural resource programs.

Most successful efforts to control weeds have been those that address the problem within an entire watershed. We recommend that the Committee require that all programs and projects using federal dollars to control weeds must be based on a watershed planning and implementation approach.

There are many nonnative invasive weed control programs already in existence on public and private land. However, many of these programs do not bring together all private and public agencies, organizations and stakeholders to mount a coordinated effort to control weeds. Government funding for control of invasive weeds on private land traditionally has come from the various federal and state departments of agriculture. We are concerned that federal funding through the Secretary of Interior might disrupt these traditional cooperative ventures. We recommend that the Secretaries of Interior and Agriculture are equally involved in the administration of any nonnative invasive weed control program on public and private lands.

We are concerned that efforts to control invasive weeds might only focus on the widespread infestations in the western states. Our Nation's waterways often provide the avenues by which invasive weeds spread throughout a watershed, and many of our waterways (rivers, streams, lakes and wetlands) are completely choked and dysfunctional because of weed infestations. We urge the Committee to address all nonnative invasive weeds in any legislation they approve, including those weeds in waterways, wetlands, farmlands, pasture and haylands and our western rangelands.

Almost all local agencies, organizations and stakeholders are concerned about invasive weeds, and most are eager to commit their own time and resources to provide control. The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Pulling Together Initiative demonstrated that it can leverage millions of dollars from a wide array of private and public partners to control weeds. We recommend that the Committee use the proven model for leveraging private resources for weed control that has been successfully employed by the NFWF's Pulling Together Initiative.

Often nonnative weeds infestations cross boundaries created between administrative, political and state entities. We are concerned that H.R. 1462 would not accommodate nor encourage cooperative efforts across all of these boundaries, such as a multi-state weed control project. We recommend that the Committee provide funding to a broad array of cooperative ventures to control invasive weeds, including multi-state projects.

Finally, we are concerned that H.R. 1462 will reduce or eliminate much of the federal funds available to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's (NFWF) Pulling Together Initiative. Six federal agencies contribute substantial funds each year to the cooperative invasive weed control partnerships that have been formed under the Pulling Together Initiative. Many of these existing partnership, including the purple loosestrife control project that WMI administers in Nebraska and South Dakota, would be affected severely if the Secretary of the Interior withdrew the federal commitment to these cooperative weed control ventures. We urge the Committee to support the existing and future cooperative weed control partnerships in the NFWF's Pulling Together Initiative (PTI). The PTI has a proven record of leveraging millions of private dollars to match federal dollars in cooperatively controlling invasive weeds on private and public lands. We would be very disappointed to see the effectiveness of the PTI program diminished or destroyed by a new duplicative program that draws upon the same partners and the same private and public funds.

### ***Concluding Remarks***

We thank the Chairman and members of the Committee for inviting the Wildlife Management Institute to testify on H.R. 1462. Nonnative weeds are costing our nation's economy more than \$130 billion per year, and we are very concerned that our wildlife and other natural resources will suffer irreparable harm if we do not act now. We fully support a broad array of active and cooperative nonnative invasive weed control ventures on public and private lands. We believe significant and long-term funding is needed to assist these partnerships in controlling weeds within all of our Nation's watersheds. Funding for invasive weed control on our public lands is woefully inadequate to stop the spread of these insidious pests, but we would not support funding for any new weed control program that would be at the expense of other federal natural resource programs or existing cooperative weed control partnerships, such as our purple loosestrife project in Nebraska and South Dakota that is funded through the highly successful Pulling Together Initiative. Mr. Chairman, we respectfully request that our written and oral comments presented here today be entered into the permanent written record of this hearing.

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