



United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
Washington, DC 20240

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The Honorable Cynthia Lummis
Chairman
Subcommittee on Interior
Committee on Natural Resources
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Lummis:

Enclosed are responses prepared by the Department of the Interior to questions submitted following the Subcommittee's December 1, 2015, oversight hearing on Federal agency coordination on invasive species.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this material to the Subcommittee.

Sincerely,

Christopher P. Salotti
Legislative Counsel
Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs

Enclosure

cc: The Honorable Brenda Lawrence
Ranking Member

Ms. Jamie Reaser
Executive Director
National Invasive Species Council
U.S. Department of the Interior

Representative Paul A. Gosar (AZ)
December 1, 2015 Hearing:
Examining Invasive Species Policy

Dr. Reaser, the lower Colorado River is on the front lines battling the Quagga Mussel and the Salt Cedar. The mussels threaten the Hoover Dam, Davis Dam, Parker Dam, Imperial Dam and the Central Arizona Project – all of which are part of my District in Arizona. These water systems supply electricity and drinking water to millions across the Southwest.

While the problem is massive in scale its implications are felt locally and require local action to mitigate their spread. Municipal leaders and community organizations in my district, such as the Lake Havasu Marine Association, are prepared and willing to do their part but need resources to do so.

1. What specific authorizations currently exist for funding mitigation program that combat Mussels or Salt Cedars on a state or local level?

Response: Generally, land management agencies within the Department of the Interior work with state and federal partners to prevent the establishment and spread of quagga and zebra mussels and tamarisk (salt cedar) under both Executive Order 13112 and a variety of statutory authorities. Major authorities include the National Environmental Policy Act, the Endangered Species Act, the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act, the Lacey Act, the Federal Land Policy Management Act, the Taylor Grazing Act, and the Public Rangelands Improvement Act.

Relevant actions may also be taken under other specific authorities. For example, the Consolidated Natural Resources Act of 2008 authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to enter into agreements with willing cooperators for the purpose of protecting natural resources in units of the National Park System through collaborative efforts on land both inside and outside units of the National Park System. The National Park Service (NPS) has an agreement with the Nevada Department of Wildlife, which has been funded by both NPS and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), at Lake Mead National Recreation Area for the inspection and cleaning of boats, many of which are encrusted with quagga mussels. The purpose is to reduce the chances of quagga mussels being introduced to other waterbodies via outbound trailered boats.

Additionally, the Nonindigenous Aquatic Nuisance Prevention and Control Act of 1990 authorizes limited funding, administered by the FWS, to assist state and local efforts to address aquatic invasive species. This act authorizes the development of State and Interstate Aquatic Nuisance Species Management Plans, which are crafted by the states and identify priorities for aquatic nuisance species management within and across State jurisdictions. These plans are

eligible to receive funding from FWS if approved by the Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force, co-chaired by FWS and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

The Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) addresses invasive species issues consistent with its general authority to operate and maintain its projects under the Reclamation Act of 1902 (Act). BOR has authorization and funding pursuant to both the Act and the National Invasive Species Act of 1996 and Executive Order 13112 to participate in coordinating efforts with other federal agencies and the private sector to prevent and control the spread of invasive species, such as mussels and tamarisk. Specific authority and funding were also provided in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act in 2009, focused on mussel detection at high risk locations. The NPS, FWS, and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) all work with state and local partners to reduce the spread of invasive species, including tamarisk infestations, under authorities in the Plant Protection Act, including the cooperative agreement authority in section 15 of the Noxious Weed Act and provisions of the Noxious Weed Control Act of 2004, which establishes a program to provide assistance through states to eligible weed management entities to control or eradicate harmful, nonnative weeds on public and private lands.

Through the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Act, FWS also provides funding to partnerships for habitat restoration projects on private lands, which include riparian habitat restoration projects that address salt cedar in several states, including Arizona, California, Utah, and Colorado. The BLM partners with states and other partners under programs such as Challenge Cost Share and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Pulling Together Initiative to enter into cooperative arrangements to accomplish high priority habitat improvement or protection projects, including projects that address mussels or salt cedar.

As you know, the Tamarisk, or Salt Cedar, has also spread throughout the Colorado River basin. It has been especially damaging to areas in Arizona and my district along the Gila River. These invasive and thirsty shrubs steal already limited water to push out native plants, strain agriculture resources, and disrupt economic activity.

In communities where the tamarisk invasion has developed into crisis – like Buckeye, Arizona on the Gila River – local and state leaders have developed action plans to eradicate the shrub and restore natural habitats. However these mitigation plans have either got lost in the complicated web of federal invasive species policy or met flat out resistance by federal agencies.

2. What has the NISC done to engage communities and empower them to leverage local resources and expertise to address problems unique to their area?

Response: NISC is comprised of the secretaries and administrators of 13 federal departments and agencies. It focuses on high-level policy and planning. Within the Department of the Interior, individual agencies have cooperative initiatives with local communities. For example, the BLM in Yuma, Arizona, provides Stewardship Contracting to remove salt cedar along the Colorado River. This contracting opens up new opportunities to work with our partners on long-

term projects. It also allows the BLM to direct any proceeds from selling the by-products of land treatments back into the projects.

Following a 2007 fire and in accordance with the National Fire Plan and the President's Healthy Forest Initiative, the BLM Phoenix District Office began a series of projects to reduce hazardous fuel accumulations and restore degraded habitat caused by salt cedar infestations along the Gila River. Three projects – Buckeye, Robins Butte, and Powers Butte – have treated and restored 273 acres outside of Buckeye, Arizona.

Since 2004, the Barstow Field Office in California has treated nearly 300 acres of tamarisk along the Armargosa River through a partnership with FWS, The Nature Conservancy, a local conservancy, and private landowners on both public and adjoining private lands.

3. Are there programs, special funding, or streamlined policy incentives for Indian Tribes or local entities who partner with Indian tribes to address invasive species problems in their communities?

Response: There are two components to the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Invasive Species program. The noxious weed program focuses on on-the-ground management and treatment of noxious weeds on trust rangelands. This component provides financial and technical assistance to agencies, tribes, and tribal entities to implement weed control projects on trust rangelands. Competitive funding criteria emphasize cooperative and integrated weed management, local priority species, and Early Detection/Rapid Response. To extend the reach of program funding and to ensure cooperator commitment, funding requires a minimum of 50 percent non-program cost-share contribution. The program also provides and supports weed awareness training and research into biological control.

This program also provides funding to assist tribes in the management, control, and prevention of invasive species threats that occur outside the realm of agricultural operations. This component of the invasive species program protects important tribal resources such as fisheries, wildlife, clean water, healthy ecosystems, and forest health, by providing tribes with funding to address invasive species issues on a landscape level, through collaboration with existing efforts or by developing their own management strategies where ongoing efforts do not exist. Funding is awarded through a competitive process according to uniform ranking criteria. No matching funds are required for this component of the Invasive Species Program.

Incentives for partnerships exist where tribal resources and public resources intersect, such as ceded areas in the Great Lakes and Pacific NW where off-reservation Treaty rights have been upheld. Resources in the off-reservation co-managed areas provide benefits to both the public and tribes and thus provide a large geographic area where shared interests provide incentive for partnerships.

Ms. Jamie Reaser
Executive Director
National Invasive Species Council
U.S. Department of the Interior

Chairman Cynthia Lummis (WY)
December 1, 2015 Hearing:
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Dr. Reaser, one of the greatest invasive species threats for western states is cheatgrass. This invasive weed increases the risk for wildfires by drying out early in the growing season. It also destroys the native habitat of endangered species, such as the sage grouse. Recent press reports indicate that the Bureau of Land Management is considering the use of biological thinning, or flash grazing, to control cheatgrass. This process uses cattle grazing to reduce cheatgrass and consequently lower the wildfire risk and create space for desirable plants.

1. Does NISC support this method for cheatgrass mitigation and if so, how will NISC support these efforts?

Response: NISC is comprised of the secretaries and administrators of 13 federal departments and agencies. It focuses on high-level policy and planning and does not take positions on methodologies for addressing invasive species because the best practices for addressing invasive species are very context specific. They change among locations and through time. These decisions are best made by the agency personnel working “on the ground.” At the agency level, the BLM has a substantial amount of experience addressing cheatgrass. BLM staff use an Integrated Pest Management/Integrated Vegetation Management approach when addressing cheatgrass. These efforts must combine cultural and physical practices – along with biological and chemical options – in such a way as to minimize potential economic, ecological, and sociological impacts. The recent registration of a biopesticide, the D7 strain of *Pseudomonas fluorescens*, sold under the trade name D7® along with an additional strain ACK55, which is currently under review for registration, offer a unique management tool. Both biopesticides are for the management of three invasive grass species: downy brome/cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum* L.), medusahead rye (*Taeniatherum caput-medusae* [L.] Nevski), and jointed goatgrass (*Aegilops cylindrica* L.). This past fall, the BLM established plots of the D7® strain of *Pseudomonas fluorescens* in 17 field offices in seven states at a maximum of 50 acres per field study site. In addition to a new potential herbicide active ingredient option, mechanical options have been used for years in addressing this issue. Moreover, timing and various types of equipment have proven to be effective under certain conditions and with different plant species. The BLM is incorporating the use of targeted grazing into the management of several invasive

species, including downy brome/cheatgrass. Researchers are working on identifying ways in which each of these various management options can be incorporated into a management process.