



**Testimony of James D. Ogsbury  
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Oversight Hearing on Invasive Species  
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Subcommittee on Public Lands and Environmental Regulation  
Committee on Natural Resources  
United States House of Representatives

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Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for providing the opportunity for the Western Governors' Association (WGA) to testify today. My name is James D. Ogsbury and I am the Executive Director of the WGA. WGA is an independent, non-partisan organization representing the Governors of 19 Western states and three U.S.-flag islands.

Western Governors are encouraged that the Subcommittee is focusing this oversight hearing on the insidious problem of invasive species, which poses a serious and growing threat to our region. Over the years, the federal government has invested substantial taxpayer resources to address this problem. Nevertheless, invasive species continue to proliferate.

Aquatic and terrestrial invasive species are causing extensive damage across western landscapes, coastal areas and Pacific Islands -- and have been doing so for some time. In California alone, over 1000 non-native species have been identified. All over the region, invasive species are harming natural environments and habitat, recreational uses, shore and marine uses, industrial and municipal uses, grazing, and timber harvests.

Invasions of non-native species are resulting in:

- decreased biodiversity of native plants, birds, reptiles, and mammals;
- increased vulnerability of native species, some of which are endangered and threatened species;
- electrical power outages and disruptions;
- physical disruption of water supply systems and increased flood damage;
- increased wildfire severity (especially from non-native grass);
- reduced value of federal, state and private lands; and

- economic harm to communities.

Let me illustrate the Governors' concerns with several specific examples of invasive species that are now creating challenges for the West:

*Aquatic Mussels:*

Aquatic invasive species (such as zebra and Quagga mussels) are spreading into more western water bodies each year. Western states are on high alert to contain, control, and prevent their proliferation. The most common sources for the introduction of these species are recreational watercraft and materials sold by aquatic plant and animal suppliers.

Invasion of these mussels result in impairments to water supplies for drinking, energy production, and irrigation. The economic consequences are severe. For example, the operators and customers of large power plants and water users are spending millions of dollars to clean out zebra mussels from water facilities and additional funds to retrofit those facilities to prevent future invasions. In addition, native fish and wildlife habitat are negatively impacted when these species become established in streams, lakes, estuaries and other water bodies.

Western states have committed significant resources to man watercraft inspection and decontamination stations for invasive species, but this tactic cannot be the only line of defense. California currently dedicates over \$7 million annually to prevent the spread of Quagga and zebra mussels into and within state. Decontaminating Quagga/zebra mussel fouled watercraft at their source, especially federally managed water bodies, such as Lake Mead National Recreation Area, is essential, or we will continue to witness the spread of Quagga and zebra mussel to new areas in the western U.S.

These growing costs do not include local reservoir prevention program or control expenses for water agencies in southern California, including the Metropolitan Water District, which currently spends millions of dollars annually to treat infested Colorado River water. Interception -- whether at the source or at the borders -- is critical for California, where water project control costs can run as high as \$40 million dollars annually if mussels infest the system.

*Cheatgrass:*

Cheatgrass is an aggressive invader of ponderosa pine, mountain brush, and other rangeland and forest areas in the West. Its ability to rapidly grow, reproduce and overtake native grasses makes it especially troublesome on

ranges, croplands, and pastures. Where it becomes dense and dominant, cheatgrass can make wildfires even more severe because they burn easily. After a wildfire, cheatgrass thrives and out-competes native shrubby seedlings such as antelope bitterbrush.

Cheatgrass can also diminish recreational opportunities, reduce available forage, degrade wildlife diversity and habitat, and decrease land values. It is important to note that managed grazing practices have historically helped to reduce large, high-intensity range fires and, consequently, the spread of invasive species like cheatgrass. As grazing has become less prevalent on federal lands, cheatgrass has had more opportunity to thrive.

Western states and Pacific Islands are responding as best they can at the local and state levels. For example:

- New Mexico's "Restore New Mexico Partnership" -- working with the state of New Mexico, USDA-NRCS, and BLM -- has now treated over two million acres of invasive species, including Russian Olive and Salt Cedar (Tamarisk) in the past eight years.
- Colorado is piloting a collaborative effort between state, county and municipal governments to tackle land-based invasive weeds, such as tamarisk. The "Lend a Hand for Your Lakes and Lands" project is raising awareness about this significant natural resource challenge while engaging youth and other volunteers in management solutions.
- Island ecosystems and economies are particularly vulnerable to invasive species impacts. For example, Brown Tree snakes brought to Guam in U.S. Army Jeeps during the World War Two have resulted in the extinction of 12 native bird species. The Pacific Invasives Partnership promotes coordinated planning and assistance from regional and international agencies to meet the invasive species management needs of countries and territories of the Pacific.
- Montana Governor Bullock and the 2013 Montana legislature strengthened state laws regarding the control of aquatic invasive species (AIS) and provided a substantial boost in funding to support those efforts. The new law establishes a statewide management area to prevent new AIS introductions through watercraft and equipment inspection stations at state borders. The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks is the lead agency, with the Montana Departments of Transportation and Natural Resources & Conservation also

tasked with major responsibilities. The agencies are currently providing training for watercraft inspectors and establishing 20 highway watercraft inspection stations.

- In California, invasive aquatic plants, such as water hyacinth and other invasive plants have proliferated to the point that they: obstruct navigation and create hazards for boats and other watercraft; impair recreational uses such as swimming, fishing, and hunting; damage water delivery and flood control systems; alter water quality; and degrade the physical and chemical characteristics of fish and wildlife habitat. California's aquatic weed control activities cost over \$6 million annually.
- The 100th Meridian Initiative is a cooperative effort among local, state, provincial, regional and federal agencies to prevent the westward spread of zebra and Quagga mussels and other aquatic nuisance species in North America, as well as to monitor, contain, eradicate and control zebra mussels and other aquatic nuisance species if detected.
- Idaho has long been at the forefront of invasive species management. Most recently, the state released the *Idaho Invasive Species Strategic Plan, 2012-2016*. WGA respectfully requests that the plan be included with our written testimony in the hearing record.

Despite best efforts, western states and territories cannot adequately prevent or reduce the spread of invasive species on their own. Federal agencies own and manage more than forty percent of the land in the West.

In 2010, Western Governors called for a better coordinated, nationwide effort to control and manage invasive species. WGA urged that available federal funding be focused on the worst problems, regardless of land ownership, and targeted at the ground level on federal and non-federal lands to reduce invasive species. I am providing a copy of WGA policy resolution 10-4, *Combating Invasive Species*, as part of my testimony today.

Unfortunately, it seems little progress has been made at the federal and regional level since 2010. Western Governors sent a letter to the leadership of House and Senate natural resources committees supporting new invasive species management legislation. The Governors urged the legislation to ensure:

- a more focused and streamlined federal approach to the invasive species problem;

- implementation of aggressive federal invasive species control programs that result in more on-the-ground prevention, management, and eradication of invasive species;
- opportunities for collaboration with states and Pacific Islands to prevent the spread of invasive species populations, avert new unauthorized introductions, and work together to set priorities for invasive species management;
- improved intergovernmental coordination and communication regarding invasive species infestations in order to facilitate the most effective, cooperative and rapid response; and
- increased transparency and accountability regarding how federal funds are allocated and used for the prevention, control and management of invasive species.

We believe that those federal agencies that have jurisdictional responsibility for land and water resources (i.e., Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Reclamation, Office of Insular Affairs, U.S. Forest Service, and Army Corps of Engineers) must work with the states and territories to: implement aggressive invasive species control programs; provide grant resources for monitoring, intrastate interdiction and containment; and establish a rapid response to early detection of invasive species.

New Mexico's partnership program provides a great example of how effective this kind of federal-state-local coordination can be when treating invasive species on public and private lands. The New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts has administered the funds for the BLM and has completed coordinated management plans for over 143 private ranchers. The NMACD has also executed and managed contracts for very large landscape scale treatment projects. The ability to do landscape scale treatment projects (with matching federal, state, and private dollars) has resulted in lower per-acre cost of treatment.

Western Governors are keenly aware of the fiscal constraints under which Congress and the federal agencies are currently operating. We believe, however, that an effective response to the economic and ecological devastation caused by invasive species can be achieved, if existing resources are deployed more wisely and efficiently.

As the Committee begins its work to draft invasive species legislation, Western Governors urge you to concentrate your efforts on what can make a difference where it

matters: on the ground. States, in partnership with federal agencies, have the expertise to run effective invasive species eradication programs.

Again, Western Governors urge the Subcommittee to pursue and champion invasive species legislation during the 113<sup>th</sup> Congress. Thank you for the opportunity to be a part of today's hearing on an issue of great importance to the western states and Pacific Islands.

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