

Western Invasives Network

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February 25, 2013

To: Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources

Re: Oregon Department of Agriculture's Noxious Weed Control Program

Co-chairs Edwards and Unger, and members of the committee-

I am submitting testimony on behalf of the Western Invasive Network's (WIN) seven Oregon Cooperative Weed Management Areas in Oregon. WIN is an informal voluntary, non-regulatory multi-agency network of individuals and organizations concerned with rural and urban invasive weed issues in northwestern Oregon. Partners represent a wide variety of organizations, including: timber companies; soil and water conservation districts; watershed councils; state/local parks and recreation departments; OSU Extension; county public works departments; state natural resource management agencies; and, city/county governments.

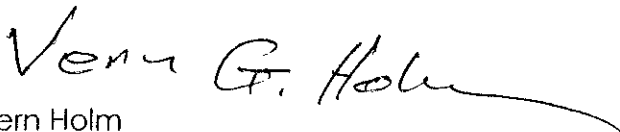
We see the Oregon Department of Agriculture's Noxious Weed Program as being an integral part of protecting Oregon's economic and ecological health by helping to protect private and public land from noxious weeds that invade crops, forests and natural areas.

In addition, through their control of invasive weeds that would otherwise choke out native vegetation and/or promulgate erosion, the ODA Noxious Weed staff also plays a key role in ensuring clean water and streamside habitat needed by wild salmon. Without control of such invasive plants as false indigo, giant reed grass, knotweed, and other riparian invasives, water quality diminishes resulting in a loss of spawning beds, as well as cover and food supplies for smolts and minnows.

Finally, WIN partners not only depend on the ODA Noxious Weed Program for on the ground control using the latest Integrated Pest Management practices, we see ODA staff as providing a vital role of education/outreach by sharing their expertise with others. Through this sharing, the funds going to ODA staff are leveraged many times as good practices are replicated throughout the state.

For the above reasons, as you do your difficult job managing funding for the state of Oregon, we ask that you provide as much support as possible to the Oregon Department of Agriculture's Noxious Weed Program.

Thank you,



Vern Holm

Coordinator, Western Invasives Network
Member, Oregon Invasive Species Council
Director, Oregon Vegetation Management Association
Board, Oregon Cooperative Weed Management Association
Board, Institute for Applied Ecology

February 28, 2013

**Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources
Testimony on the Oregon Department of Agriculture Budget and its
Weed Control Program**



Noxious

Co-chairs Edwards and Unger and members of the committee,

My name is Lisa DeBruyckere, and I am President of Creative Resource Strategies, LLC, a small consulting firm that assists natural resource entities with communication needs.

My purpose in writing you is to share with you the results of a set of four listening sessions I conducted with 30 Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) stakeholders in December of 2012 to obtain their perspectives on the relevance of ODA's Noxious Weed Control Program.

Listening session participants represented the diverse geography of Oregon, and included federal, county, and local government entities, nonprofit organizations, weed control districts, soil and water conservation districts, academic extension, cooperative weed management areas, and watershed councils. They described coordination, facilitation, outreach and education, early detection rapid response, stewardship, communication, enforcement, control, management, engineering, providing technical assistance, offering incentives, conducting surveys and assessments, and working with private landowners and partners as their key roles and responsibilities.

The diversity of organizational structures and methods of funding for noxious weed control in Oregon is as diverse as the organizations involved in program implementation. How programs are funded affect the ability to implement long-term sustainable programs and set priorities. Projected reductions in federal and state funding for invasive species will have a negative cascading effect among organizations throughout the state of Oregon, especially because the majority receive either state or federal funding as part of their funding portfolio.

Most listening session participants indicated staff time and financial resources are devoted primarily to on-the-ground work, but all recognize the importance of a diverse program that consists of outreach and education, early detection, rapid response, recordkeeping, communication and coordination, and surveying and monitoring. Several respondents described the difficulty in obtaining funding for outreach and education and monitoring, the latter being critical for adaptive management and informing future management actions.

Most organizations do not have the capacity to address their highest priorities, and few have the capacity to address secondary priorities, which elevate to higher priorities when not addressed quickly. Barriers to addressing highest priorities included funding, lack of sufficient numbers of skilled contractors in both rural and urban parts of the state during key times of the year, insufficient resources to address new vectors of introduction, insufficient legal ability to treat weeds and lack of an adequate regulatory framework, the tension that exists between expending the majority of resources on small acreages in remote areas versus expending the majority of resources along roadsides, lack of in-house expertise on chemical treatments, public perception issues, lack of adequate personnel, and insufficient prioritization of weeds locally (versus statewide priorities). Numerous participants expressed concern about the future of existing funding programs, including the Farm Bill, Oregon State Weed Board grants, and other programs.

A complex network of organizations work together at a variety of scales to collaborate, exchange services, and provide and share resources. **Essential to that network is ODA, which is recognized for their expertise and assistance in providing information and on-the-ground activities relative to chemical treatments.** Collaboration and coordination is integral to successful noxious weed control management in Oregon, and little, if any, duplication exists. It was noted that if counties had a leadership role in weed programs, then landowners would have local staff that could provide noxious weed management assistance.

There are gaps in Oregon's ability to administer an effective and comprehensive noxious weed control program. These include lack of adequate funding, failure to perform risk assessments in a reasonable period of time, inability to prevent new introductions by failing to focus on vectors, lack of a statewide awareness public campaign re: noxious weeds, lack of political will to adequately fund noxious weed efforts, lack of weed control districts throughout the state, regulatory shortfalls, procedural barriers, lack of statewide prioritization, inconsistent border patrols, lack of adequate county enforcement, gaps in the ability of entities to use all of the tools available for invasive species management, lack of biosecurity at the state level, lack of good information about the controls and treatments of noxious weeds, failure to develop an adequate infrastructure for early detection rapid response, and failure to create a clearinghouse for noxious weed information best management practices.

Participants described the leadership role that ODA plays as critical to noxious weed management in the state, from grants disbursed through the Oregon State Weed Board to their role as regulators and enforcers as well as educators. **Participants described the efficiencies they experienced as a result of ODA staff expertise and on-the-ground control,** although several noted if less on-the-ground management was performed, more time could be available for their staff to serve in a consulting and education role [currently, shortfalls in funding require ODA staff to perform on-the-ground management on federal lands]. **ODA staff play an important role intersecting with local weed managers, they coordinate across states, they participate in important biocontrol programs, they practice quality control as they visit sites, they work closely with the nursery industry, and they provide a statewide framework that other entities rely on and intersect with as noxious weed programs are implemented.**

Weaknesses in ODA's noxious weed control program include lack of visibility, inadequate funding and capacity, failure to address larger political issues, lack of visibility and sharing success stories, the need to enhance notifications to land management entities when biocontrols are being released, the desire to more clearly articulate State Weed Board priorities, the existence of regulatory gaps, and duplication of efforts with weed mapping databases.

I would be pleased to provide the complete report to you in its entirety, but believe the executive summary provided here adequately describes the importance of ODA and its leadership role in directing statewide noxious weed programs that help protect Oregon's economy, agriculture, and natural resources.

I apologize for not being able to present this testimony in person – I will be out of state during ODA's budget hearings.

If you have further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

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