

## **Testimony in Support of HB 2183**

Requires a person growing *Arundo donax* for commercial purposes to file a bond with the Invasive Species Council ...

**Susan Aldrich-Markham**

**Public Hearing March 31, 2015**

I am a retired Oregon State University Agricultural Extension Agent and Professor Emeritus. During my 25 years as an Extension Agent I worked in field crop production in the Willamette Valley, Central Oregon, Southern Oregon and the Coast, and I served a term as President of the Oregon Society of Weed Science. My particular area of expertise is weed control.

If *Arundo donax* is planted in Oregon as a bio-fuel crop on the scale envisaged by Portland General Electric to replace coal in the Boardman power plant, it is inevitable that it will escape from cultivation and begin to spread. The State of Oregon needs to make sure that when it does, money is immediately available to begin aggressive control measures. Reserve money for weed control should be part of the upfront cost of producing the crop. This cost should be borne in the present by the people who will profit from the crop, not in the future by the State of Oregon.

*Arundo donax* is most likely to gain a foothold as a weed along waterways. This plant spreads readily with bank erosion, when pieces of rhizomes break off and are carried downstream. Places where new infestations become established therefore will be difficult to locate and expensive to access for weed control. In California and other states, *Arundo donax* infestations along rivers have crowded out all native plants for miles and blocked access to the water with their densely-packed, 20-foot-tall canes. If this weed is allowed to spread to the Columbia River, it will be major environmental disaster.

To establish a crop, rhizome pieces are planted in a field. The optimum planting density is 13,680 plugs per acre according to research by conducted by OSU (Bechtoldt, Horneck and Wysocki, 2014, Agronomy of *Arundo donax* in North-Central Oregon). Even though a rhizome accidentally dropped on the ground in the dry climate of North-Central Oregon is unlikely to grow, given the millions of rhizomes to be planted on thousands of acres over the years of bio-fuel production planned by Portland General Electric, it is impossible to imagine that no rhizomes will be dropped into a moist place. It is not possible to clean farm equipment perfectly; there will be rhizomes remaining in the transport trucks, stuck in mud on tires and on planting equipment, etc. With large-scale production, it is only a matter of time until some rhizomes are inadvertently moved to hospitable spots and the weed begins to spread.

I think that planting *Arundo donax* for bio-fuel in Oregon will prove to be a serious mistake. However, if this plan is carried out, Oregon needs to be ready to deal with the consequences. Posting a sizeable bond prior to planting should be required in order to encourage responsible management and enforce remediation.

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