



The Wyoming Department of Agriculture is dedicated to the promotion and enhancement of Wyoming's agriculture, natural resources and quality of life.

Statement of Doug Miyamoto, Director, State of Wyoming - Department of Agriculture

Chairman Barrasso and Ranking Member Wyden, as well as other members of the subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests and Mining, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Doug Miyamoto and I serve as the Director of the Wyoming Department of Agriculture. Beyond my appointment as Agency Director, I have over 20 years of working on natural resources issues with the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Western Governors Association, and the Wyoming Association of Conservation Districts as well as serving as Director for the Wyoming Livestock Board. I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you concerning the issue of invasive species.

I will start by noting Wyoming supports Senate File 2240, and will try to highlight a few of the reasons why in my testimony. This legislation is a needed revision and review on how agencies, and their partners, manage invasive species on Federal lands. We are not alone in our support. Numerous organizations and state governments have supported the concepts of Senate File 2240 through policy statements or letters of support. In a recent press release the National Association of Conservation Districts stated, "The proposed bill would facilitate greater collaboration and cooperation between and across agencies and entities and help alleviate undue barriers to the work of fighting invasive species locally, state-wide, regionally and at the national level."

The problems of invasive species are not endemic to Wyoming, or a certain region of the county. Burmese pythons have invaded South Florida, Asian carp in the Great Lakes, and the carnivorous lionfish along the southeastern coast are just a few of the recognizable issues natural resource managers are facing. Other invaders such as weeds may be less easy to identify and may blend in with the natural landscape. The Tree of heaven in Hawaii, kudzu in the south or leafy spurge near Devils Tower can often be overlooked as nothing more than native plants and wildflowers. However their impacts on agriculture and natural resources is no less severe. Invasive species represent a national threat at a cost of \$120 billion every year.

In the western states, local agencies play a critical role in the management of invasive species. Wyoming law requires each county organize and fund weed and pest control districts. These districts assist state agencies and private landowners through cost-share programs. The districts utilize "best management practices" which may include the use of bio-control agents and mechanical control. Collectively, the districts work closely with the University of Wyoming to research new methods of management and control, and coordinate both regionally and nationally on programs such as the PLAYCLEANGO education campaign. In 2015, Wyoming spent roughly \$19,000,000 on its weed and pest programs and my agency contributed an additional \$570,000 through grants to local collaborative projects.

These districts are the primary cooperators for the federal agencies in our state when it comes to managing invasive weeds on federal lands. Because they are already equipped for spraying noxious weeds, federal agencies such as the Bureau of Land Management, Forest Service, and National Park Service often contract with them on control programs. With federal agencies management over 48% of the lands in our state, these local partnerships are essential to the success of Wyoming's overall program.

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Senate File 2240 is not an attack on the failures of federal invasive species programs, and the federal agencies are well aware of the impacts these species have on federal lands. The Chief of the Forest Service has identified invasive species as one of the four critical threats to our Nation's forest ecosystems. The Bureau of Land Management website states, "Nonnative plants are spreading at an alarming rate of 4,600 acres per day on federal lands in the western United States." Senate File 2240 instead gives them the tools to aggressively manage the issue on a landscape scale, while improving their ability to cooperate with programs across jurisdictional boundaries.

For example, in June 2012, the Squirrel Creek fire burned 11,000 acres of land approximately 30 miles southwest of Laramie, Wyoming. Nearly 90% of the land impacted by the fire is managed by the US Forest Service – Medicine Bow National Forest, the other 10% is owned privately or by the state. The fire engulfed portions of the Sheep Mountain Game Refuge which is managed as critical winter habitat for mule deer and elk.

Before the fire, vegetation monitoring using landsat imagery identified small pockets of cheatgrass in small scattered areas, representing less than 10% of the vegetation cover. After the fire, state and county agencies engaged the Forest Service about the need for post-fire cheatgrass management utilizing aerial applications in the rugged terrain to contain any expansion. Due to the pressure from the state and county agencies, the Medicine Bow National Forest drafted the needed Environment Impact Statement. Unfortunately for the winter range, completion of the EIS took four years. Cheatgrass is an annual grass that is prolific seed producer, and its invasion is stimulated by fire. Landsat imagery has shown that during the four years it took the Forest Service to complete the EIS, cheatgrass invaded an additional 2000 acres of the landscape and now represents nearly 25% of the vegetation cover.

Compare this to the Sheep Creek Fire in north central Wyoming last year. This fire burned nearly 1100 acres of federal, state and private lands. A majority of the fire was on the Amsden Creek Wildlife Management Area, another area critical for big game winter range. Yet because the majority of the fire was on state owned lands, post fire cheatgrass treatments were completed four months after the fire. The quick response by the state and county mitigated the potential invasion of cheatgrass onto adjoining lands including the Big Horn National Forest.

NEPA is a roadblock to invasive species management. Whether it is due to the cost, the complication of the process, or simply a lack of trained personnel, it is major reason why the federal agencies are losing the 4,600 acres per day in the west. This is not just the opinion of the states and counties, but also many other professionals in wildlife habitat management. This past year the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and the Western Weed Coordinating Committee jointly hosted a symposium on invasive weeds and sage grouse habitat. Attendees included professionals from state, county and federal agencies who identified key barriers to managing invasive weeds in sage grouse core areas. NEPA was identified as one of the primary barriers and the concept of categorical exclusions in critical situations was recommended as a potential solution. Senate File 2240 includes categorical exclusions for invasive species management in critical areas and pathways.

It has been said that a slow plan is better than no plan. The strategic planning component of the bill is an essential part of each federal agencies invasive species program. Section 4 requires each Secretary to develop a strategic plan, "to the maximum extent practicable, for an annual 5 percent net reduction of invasive species on lands managed by the Secretary concerned. The coordination aspect of the strategic planning allows the states and county programs to provide input and suggestions on how these strategies and objectives will be implemented locally. Although the 5% reduction may seem arduous, there is need for a benchmark by which federal agencies can quantify the success and failures of their programs. "A goal is not always meant to be reached; it often serves simply as something to aim at."

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Another key component of Senate File 2240 is its emphasis on funding for management and control. This is not to say survey and research are not critical, but if we do not have the means for implementation, then they become useless. Senate File 2240 requires federal agencies to plan for 75% of their invasive species budget for management and control utilizing “integrated pest management options...” In Wyoming we have defined an “integrated management system” by statute as, “the planning and implementation of a coordinated program utilizing all proven methods for containing and controlling undesirable plants and pests, including but not limited to education, preventive measures, physical methods, biological agents, pesticide methods, cultural methods and management;” In other words an integrated management plan does not exclude any proven management tool including Early Detection Rapid Response and prevention.

Federal agencies can no longer watch from the sidelines as invasive species invade federal lands. They need to be an empowered with the resources and policies to support an aggressive program. In the case of the Squirrel Creek fire the planned cheatgrass treatments are estimated to cost \$100,000. Due to the critical nature of the habitat for the state’s mule deer population, the Wyoming Game and Fish and the Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust are providing nearly half of the funding for treatments, another \$45,000 will be provided by non-government agencies. However, the Forest Service is only providing \$7,000 of the \$100,000 cost. In other words, the Medicine Bow National Forest will pay only 7% of the bill for control of cheatgrass on lands where 90% is managed by the Forest Service. If it wasn’t for the leadership of the state on this project, the treatments may not ever occur.

State and county invasive species programs were not created to management federal government lands. They were created to assist the private landowner with their private property problems. We do it because Wyoming’s landscapes are worth preserving and protecting for agriculture, for recreation and for wildlife. We cannot ignore the impacts the largest landowner in our state has on our maintaining our natural landscapes.

Sincerely,
Doug Miyamoto

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