

**ORAL COMMENTS OF KATHLEEN CLARKE, DIRECTOR,
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,
PRESENTED AT THE PUBLIC FIELD WORKSHOP, LEWISTON, IDAHO CONCERNING HARMFUL
NON-NATIVE NOXIOUS WEEDS AND THE PROBLEMS FACING PUBLIC AND PRIVATE LANDS**

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I am Kathleen Clarke, Director of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) at the U.S. Department of the Interior (Department). It is a pleasure to be here in Lewiston, Idaho, to discuss harmful non-native weeds and their impacts on public and private lands. I know this is an issue that is important to Senator Craig, and the control of these invasive pests is one of the Department's important functions. As you know, the Department recently testified at a Senate hearing on legislation sponsored by Senator Craig and, in that testimony, indicated that the Department viewed S. 198 as an important step toward greater engagement between federal and non-federal partners to manage the harmful impacts of invasive plant species and reduce their spread.

Invasive plant species are estimated to cause more than \$20 billion annually in economic damage and affect millions of acres of private and public lands. In total, invasive plants, animals, and microorganisms are estimated to cost the United States over \$100 billion each year. We concur with the basic principles embodied in the legislation specifically the recognition that a concerted and coordinated effort by the public and private sectors with requisite accountability is critical to the successful prevention, control, and management of invasive species.

Healthy and Productive Lands

Today, I would like to talk about non-native noxious weed concerns that are specific to BLM and Idaho and how the BLM is addressing the problem of non-native weeds with our partners within the State. I will also highlight the importance of healthy and productive lands and the links to weed management and important efforts such as the National Fire Plan. To achieve success in the war on weeds, we must look beyond jurisdictional boundaries to find commonalities on the broader scale, while we focus together on solutions at the local level. BLM is committed to healthy and productive lands through a process of consultation, coordination, and cooperation with all our partners throughout the West.

The Bureau of Land Management and Weed Issues

The BLM recognizes the need for expanding on-the-ground efforts at controlling invasive weeds. With the BLM's "Partners Against Weeds Strategic Plan," the BLM has followed the plan's recommendation of expanding cooperative partnerships. We can attribute much of the BLM's success in managing invasive species through cooperative partnerships with federal, state, tribal, and local government agencies, private landowners, and industries, especially those regional efforts that work across state lines.

The BLM considers public education the key to winning the war on weeds. Accordingly, our Partners Against Weeds Strategy focuses on education and outreach. BLM personnel have given over 200 slide presentations on weeds, prepared videos, produced flyers, participated in classroom projects, and conducted numerous public weed field trips. The BLM has also developed a Weed Awareness Course for its employees. In Grand Junction, Colorado, for example, the Field Office Weed Coordinator has held classes for public land users which included attendance of all of the major grazing permittees in that field office. Ranchers are now reporting new weed infestations and cooperating to help control them on private and BLM lands. As the awareness of invasive plants and their impacts accelerates, our efforts with the public also increase.

Because the BLM manages over 262 million acres of public lands, cooperative weed management efforts are essential, primarily in those areas where public lands are intermingled with state, private, and other federally-managed lands. Today more than ninety percent of the federal, State, and private lands in Idaho and California are part of Cooperative Weed Management Areas (WMA's). A WMA is an area established within states to concentrate efforts among various partners to have an integrated strategy for weed

management. For example, in fiscal year 2001 the BLM treated over 300,000 acres nationwide and was involved in over 30 weed management areas. That figure has risen annually.

In FY 2002, the BLM received \$7.7 million for weed management, a majority of which was allocated to the BLM field offices for on-the-ground weed efforts including inventory, weed treatments, and monitoring. In states with smaller amounts of infested acreage, the BLM focuses funding on efforts to provide states with the capability to detect small weed infestations in high-risk areas and to treat small infestations before they spread. The BLM is also dedicating funding to states with larger infestations, focusing efforts on areas not previously inventoried, but at risk.

National Fire Plan and Restoration Initiatives

On May 23, 2002, the Secretary of Agriculture and the Secretary of the Interior joined with the nation's Governors to endorse the Implementation Plan for the 10-Year Comprehensive Wildland Fire Strategy. The 10-Year Implementation Plan is an historic document setting forth an agenda to aggressively manage wildland fires, reduce hazardous fuels, protect communities, and restore ecosystems over the next decade. This Plan is closely linked with invasive weed management through our efforts with partners to enhance native plant restoration and to control invasive weeds after fire through the restoration efforts now being implemented through the National Fire Plan. Weed management is also a part of efforts to manage and reduce fuels in creating and maintaining healthy range and forest lands across all jurisdictions.

One example, is our work in BLM through the Great Basin Restoration Initiative (GBRI) to restore degraded rangelands that are dominated by flammable exotic grasses such as cheatgrass and restore these areas to perennial vegetation before they convert to noxious weeds. We are able to implement many of the critical actions of the GBRI through the goals and objectives of the National Fire Plan, which Congress funded and the Western Governor's Association has championed. As well you know here in Idaho, managing invasive species is directly connected to managing our rangeland and forest lands in a healthy and productive way.

Idaho Issues

Let me focus on important efforts here in Idaho. The BLM is an active member of the Idaho Weed Coordination Committee (Committee). This Committee helps prioritize weed issues and promotes cooperative efforts and funding of integrated weed control. Local BLM personnel are active in WMA's and work with private and county personnel to control weeds.

Through your support Senator Craig, funds totaling over \$1.2 million dollars have been transferred from the BLM to the Idaho Department of Agriculture over the last two years to fund Cooperative Weed Management Area projects. Thank you for this support as it has helped many projects including one to organize a State-wide mapping of noxious weeds in Idaho which has been a very successful partnership.

Tri-State Cooperative Weed Management Area

Just south of Lewiston, Idaho is the Tri-State Cooperative Weed Management Area which is one of BLM's special emphasis areas for weed management. This Tri-State WMA works with local land owners and Idaho counties to control weeds and to experiment with new weed control efforts. Tribal Governments, in Idaho and throughout the country, have also proven to be critical allies in the war on weeds. The Tri-State WMA has worked with the Nez Perce Tribe Bio-Control Center to release insects that eat weeds. This has included efforts by the BLM and by volunteers organized by the Tri-State WMA to collect bio-control insects and then redistribute them to new areas to control target weed species. Annually, the Tri-State WMA sponsors volunteer days where volunteers work on foot, horseback, and jet boat to control weeds.

Other BLM and State of Idaho Efforts

Additionally, Idaho BLM has been working with the State of Idaho to establish and fund a cooperative position under the BLM that serves both the BLM and Idaho. The emphasis of the position would be to assist BLM and consult with USFS, State of Idaho, interested Tribes, counties and Cooperative Weed

Management Areas on the use of biological control agents such as bugs that can eat weeds. The BLM is committed to working with Idaho and the various public and private groups to address the non-native noxious weed problem as a high priority. This workshop today is an important step in that process, and we look forward to working with our partners to address these issues here in Idaho and across the West.

Invasive Species Council and Federal Interagency Cooperation for Invasive Weeds

I would also like to mention the National Invasive Species Council (Council), which is co-chaired by the Departments of the Interior, Commerce and Agriculture. The Council provides coordination on invasive species issues, including invasive plants, and encourages partnership efforts to prevent and control invasive species. The Council can provide assistance with efforts to ensure a coordinated federal/state approach, and I encourage recognition of the Council's important role to control non-native noxious weeds both here in Idaho and across the nation. Another existing group that should be mentioned is the Federal Interagency Committee for the Management of Noxious and Exotic Weeds (FICMNEW). "FICMNEW" was established in 1994 under a Memorandum of Understanding and has members from 17 federal agencies that are responsible for coordinating a federal approach to the management of invasive and noxious weeds. This includes providing information about agency needs and making recommendations on research, technology transfer, and management actions to managers. The Council and FICMNEW are both important groups for partnerships in weed management issues within and outside the federal agencies.

Conclusion

I appreciate your invitation to address this workshop today to discuss the issue of invasive species. We welcome these discussions as a symbol of future commitment to early detection and rapid response to mitigate the rampant spread of invasive plants here in Idaho and across the nation. BLM has recognized the need to work directly with private landowners and state and local governments. As such, we applaud Congress's recognition of partnerships as the key to success.

We look forward to working with all stakeholders in formulating a plan that best reflects our mutual goal of assisting states, tribes, and local entities to prevent, control, and manage non-native invasive species while recognizing and strengthening existing partnership efforts among all stakeholders.

Again, thank you for this opportunity and I am happy to answer any questions that today's participants might have.