

**Written Testimony of James D. Ogsbury, Executive Director
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**Submitted to the United States Senate
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Water and Power**

**Hearing to Examine the Impact of Invasive Species on Bureau of Reclamation Facilities
and Management of Water Resources in the West**

March 4, 2020

The Western Governors' Association (WGA) appreciates the opportunity to provide written testimony for the record on the important issue of invasive species in the West. WGA is an independent organization representing the Governors of the 22 westernmost states and territories. The Association is an instrument of the Governors for bipartisan policy development, information-sharing and collective action on issues of critical importance to the western United States.

Western Governors have long been concerned about the threat invasive species pose to western waters, ecosystems and economies. Studies have found that invasive species cost the U.S. more than \$120 billion every year, and the National Wildlife Federation estimates that 42 percent of threatened or endangered species are at risk due to invasive species. Invasive species harm a wide variety of economic sectors dependent on natural resources, including agriculture, ranching, tourism, energy production and transmission, and forest products. Aquatic nuisance species, including invasive quagga and zebra mussels decrease water quantity and quality, impair native wildlife, damage hydroelectric and irrigation systems, and impede maritime transport by fouling vessel hulls.

The spread of invasive and non-native species affects nearly every aspect of life in the West. As invading species replace native plants and wildlife, the ecosystems, economies and communities that depend on the West's natural resources are damaged and diminished, sometimes permanently. Improving biosecurity and invasive species management practices is essential to protecting the West from new invading species, reducing the effects of established species, and restoring the region's working lands and native ecosystems.

In July 2018, Hawai'i Governor David Ige, as Chair of WGA, launched the *Western Governors' Biosecurity and Invasive Species Initiative*. The Initiative focused on the effects that nuisance species, pests and pathogens have on ecosystems, forests, rangelands, watersheds and infrastructure in the West, and examined the role biosecurity plays in addressing these risks. The Initiative explored these issues through workshops hosted by Governors throughout the West, followed by webinars focusing on discrete topics in invasive species management.

The *Biosecurity and Invasive Species Initiative's Special Report* contains more than 35 recommendations to achieve the following goals:

- Protect the West from the introduction of new invasive species through enhanced biosecurity practices, preparedness, and planning;
- Improve cross-boundary collaboration and coordination for the management of established and emerging invasive species;
- Empower state and federal agencies to manage invasive species by aligning federal laws, regulations, and funding mechanisms with states' needs;
- Support and utilize biosecurity research, technology and planning tools, and;
- Standardize and mobilize invasive species data.

In June 2019, Western Governors adopted WGA Policy Resolution 2019-06, *Biosecurity and Invasive Species Management*. In the resolution, Western Governors articulate detailed policies and outline concrete action items to improve biosecurity and combat invasive species.

One of those items was to call for the creation of a Western Invasive Species Council (WISC) to: enhance coordination between existing state invasive species councils; improve communication and collaboration on regional biosecurity and invasive species control efforts; and advocate for regional needs at the federal level. I am pleased to report that WGA announced the formation of WISC in October 2019. To date, 17 Western Governors have appointed members to the Council, and it is already working to improve coordination of invasive species management in western states.

The resolution also emphasizes that accurate, standardized and accessible geospatial data is essential to biosecurity and invasive species management in the West. Governors support efforts to: standardize and centralize invasive species occurrence data; streamline the exchange of data between the nation's major invasive species data aggregators; and increase the accessibility of data to federal, state, and local land and resource managers. To address these needs, WGA is launching an Invasive Species Data Mobilization Campaign to encourage invasive species managers in the West to standardize and share their invasive species occurrence data. The campaign is largely being informed by the findings and recommendations of the WGA Invasive Species Data Management Workshop, hosted by WGA in Denver, Colorado, in March 2019.

In December 2018, WGA and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to establish a framework for the U.S. Forest Service and WGA to work collaboratively to accomplish mutual goals, advance common interests, and effectively respond to the increasing suite of challenges facing western landscapes. The MOU, an outgrowth of the USDA Shared Stewardship strategy and the WGA National Forest and Rangeland Management Initiative, has helped Western Governors and USDA identify shared priorities and collaborative projects to increase active management on western forests and rangelands.

One such effort, announced by WGA and USDA in June 2019, is a campaign to meaningfully address the large-scale infestation of cheatgrass and other invasive annual grasses

on forests and rangelands in the West. Non-native grasses and trees have seriously deleterious effects on water quantity in western states. Invasive species also affect wildfire potential, impair post-fire restoration efforts, and diminish water quality in wildfire-affected landscapes.

WGA and USDA are developing a common spatial strategy to address cheatgrass and invasive annual grass management at a regional scale. This strategy will employ new analytical tools and use proven management practices, such as integrated pest management and targeted grazing. The strategy will use early detection and rapid response principles to protect pristine and biologically intact “core” areas and will include an examination of the operation of cooperative weed management areas or similar locally based invasive annual grass cooperatives.

Because these terrestrial invasives can have such significant effects on both the quality and quantity of water resources, Western Governors appreciate the Committee’s consideration of species such as salt cedar (tamarisk). In 2018, WGA surveyed invasive species coordinators in western states and territories to develop a list of the Top 50 Invasive Species in the West, and salt cedar was identified as the number one terrestrial threat. Also near the top of the list of terrestrial threats were Eurasian watermilfoil and curly leaf pondweed.

The Subcommittee’s focus on the effect of aquatic invasive species on western water resources is also encouraging. Invasive quagga and zebra mussels are of particular concern, as these invaders annually result in millions of dollars in lost economic activity and cause significant environmental damage to waterbodies in the West. It is of paramount importance to prevent the spread of these species into waterways that are not yet infested, including the Columbia River basin – the last major non-infested water system in the continental U.S. and the headwaters of other major rivers.

Cross-boundary cooperation across all levels of government and between federal agencies is critical to adequately addressing these invasive threats. The primary means by which these aquatic mussels spread is by traveling on the hulls and in the ballast tanks of boats leaving infested waterbodies. The coordinated application of effective inspection and decontamination practices as watercraft leave infested waters is the first line of defense against their proliferation.

Federal agencies have jurisdiction over several major infested waterbodies in the West, including Lake Mead, Lake Powell and Lake Havasu. The boat inspection and decontamination policies of the agencies managing infested waterbodies – the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR), and the National Park Service (NPS) – are key to regional efforts to contain these species. These agencies operate several voluntary inspection and decontamination programs at these infested waterbodies, mostly at the request of, and in collaboration with, states. These programs are hampered, however, by a lack of clear statutory authority for federal agencies to manage all high-risk vessels (long-term slipped and moored watercraft) upon their departure from infested waterbodies under federal jurisdiction.

The containment of invasive quagga and zebra mussels at infested waters in the West depends upon the collaboration of federal, state and local agencies. Many state-led containment programs benefit from federal cooperation and funding, and state and federal agencies should be encouraged to sustain and expand these effective partnerships.

To adequately protect the West from the movement of aquatic invasive species, federal agencies must be able to act as full partners in invasive species containment efforts and have the funding and authorities necessary to contain invasive species within lands and waters under their jurisdiction. To this end, federal agencies, including BLM, BOR, and NPS, should be vested with clear authority to manage watercraft upon their departure from infested waterbodies under federal jurisdiction.

Federal agencies also have jurisdiction over the management of vessels in the marine environment, particularly following the passage of the Vessel Incidental Discharge Act of 2018. Under this policy, management of discharges from vessels, including ballast water and hull fouling organisms, is consolidated under the Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Coast Guard. It is critical that these agencies engage in more substantial consultation with states in order to adequately address the risk of invasive species being transported by maritime vessels.

Western Governors support the Early Detection and Rapid Response (EDRR) framework as a method to limit or eliminate new introductions and existing species expansion. Programs for the control and/or eradication of invasive species must result in more on-the-ground prevention, management and eradication. The Incident Command System (ICS) should be evaluated for use in instances of fast-spreading invasives and used as part of EDRR; state, federal, and local agencies can opt to practice and implement the ICS as part of rapid response. The Federal Emergency Management Agency can support these efforts by working with western states to create an ICS training module for invasive species rapid response.

The federal government can support state-led rapid response programs by: 1) increasing federal funding for state-led aquatic invasive species rapid response programs, including those that provide mechanisms for flexible, long-term support of state early detection rapid response efforts; 2) streamlining federal permitting and approval processes for treatment and management actions for new mussel detections; 3) creating a single federal authority for aquatic invasive species treatment permitting and approval in freshwater systems; and 4) simplifying reporting on new invasive mussel infestations by creating a single federal point of contact for new mussel detections.

Thank you for providing the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of WGA. Western Governors appreciate your examination of the serious and pervasive threat invasive species pose to western water resources and stand ready to assist as you consider steps to improve our nation's biosecurity and invasive species management practices.