



Why Are Invasive Species an Appropriate Issue for the Next Farm Bill?

Invasive species threaten agriculture, forestry, and the environment of all regions of the country. Examples abound. Invasive weeds threaten agriculture in the Midwest, invasive insects threaten forests in New England, feral hogs cause extensive damage across the South, and the California wine industry and Florida citrus industry are under constant threat from invasive insects and diseases. More broadly, invasive species annually cause more than \$125 billion in damage to the American economy including agriculture, forest products, utilities, transportation, flood control, and outdoor recreation. About half of this impact is on agriculture, and yet the existing 2014 Farm Bill only mentions invasive species in one place in the 356-page statute.

Invasive species increase the frequency, severity, cost, and loss of human life from catastrophic wildfire, by both adding to the fuel load and killing millions of trees that are then susceptible to fire. As a result, federal firefighting costs continue to grow, homes and property are destroyed, lives are endangered, and the productivity of America's grasslands and forests is decreased.

Invasive species harm native species to the point where they become listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Roughly 45% of species listed under the ESA are on that list due at least in part to damage from invasives, and invasives also pose serious risks for many species that are candidates for listing under the ESA. Thus, invasive species indirectly impose a significant regulatory burden on America's farmers, ranchers, and timber communities. The most dramatic near-miss in this regard was the recent potential listing of the greater sage grouse under the Endangered Species Act. The bird's habitat across much of the West has been degraded by invasive cheat grass, which for years has increased the severity and frequency of rangeland fires, progressively destroying the bird's habitat. If the bird had been listed under the ESA, a wide variety of economic activity across 11 Western states would have been jeopardized.

Agricultural infrastructure is also at risk from invasive species. Zebra and quagga mussels threaten to foul irrigation works in the Pacific Northwest, while tamarisk exacerbates Western drought by tapping into stressed Western rivers, and invasive aquatic weeds clog water delivery systems.

Globally, the California Academy of Sciences reported in May 2014 that invasives cause \$1.4 trillion in global economic damage. The Economist reported in September 2013 that invasives are implicated in 50% of all species extinctions since the year 1600, and solely responsible for 20% of them. Americans are killed each year directly or indirectly due to invasive species. Africanized honey bees, fire ants, diseases that can be passed from wild or domestic animals to humans are just a handful of examples. Time featured invasive species as the cover story of its July 28, 2014 issue, observing that "from Russian beetles to giant African snails, the US is under assault – and it's costing us billions." In December 7, 2016, The Wall Street Journal, New York Times, and Washington Post all ran an AP story entitled, "Spread by trade and climate, bugs butcher America's forests." That article featured invasive insects like the emerald ash borer, Asian longhorned beetle, and hemlock wood adelgid that are collectively killing tens of millions of trees across the United States, threatening suburban communities, commercial forests, and natural areas alike.

The time is right to systematically and comprehensively address invasive species in the next Farm Bill.

For more information:

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