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On behalf of the New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts representing the forty-seven (47) soil and water conservation districts, I would like to Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments on S.144 the 'Noxious Weed Control Act of 2003'.

This legislation is very important to the health of our rangelands, riparian areas and entire ecosystems. Non-native or "Noxious" weeds are destroying habitat, increasing erosion, and stealing our precious water resources.

This legislation would establish a program to provide financial assistance through States to eligible weed management entities. In New Mexico, the local soil and water conservation districts are taking the lead in coordinating these local weed management entities along with the Cooperative Extension Service and the New Mexico Department of Agriculture.

The soil and water conservation districts in New Mexico have been very aggressive in securing state and local funding for control and management of salt cedar and Russian Olive which are just two (2) of the plant species plaguing the west. The state legislature has appropriated 11.2 million dollars in the past 3 years.

Soil and water conservation districts work on private, state, federal, and tribal lands with the consent of the landowners. They have a very unique delivery system. We have treated 23,565 acres of Tamarix (Salt Cedar) on the Pecos and Rio Grande Rivers through application of a herbicide called "Arsenal". We have treated 644.07 acres utilizing various mechanical control methods.

COOPERATIVE WEED MANAGEMENT AREAS IN NEW MEXICO AND THE EFFECT OF THE CRAIG-HEFFLEY LEGISLATION

- ❑ New Mexico, like many other Southwestern states, has no legislatively created weed management districts or programs. Instead, we have relied solely on the development of cooperative weed management areas. These programs are a voluntary effort to coordinate weed management amongst the private landowners and numerous government agencies within a county, soil and water conservation district, or watershed.
- ❑ CWMA's around the state vary in their organization, while the focus remains largely the same. Almost all CWMA's have an education, mapping, management, and monitoring program of one type or another. The organization and leadership varies based on local capacity. In most counties, the soil and water conservation district is the lead agency or fiscal manager of the program. In other counties, the county extension agent serves as the program coordinator.
- ❑ In New Mexico, most CWMA's have been based on political boundaries rather than watersheds. In most cases, human activity, like road maintenance, is the

largest source of spread of noxious weeds, while water drainages are less important vectors for many species.

- ❑ Most of the CWMA funding for weed management has come from grants. The Noxious Weed Control Act, if passed, will not replace the amount of money coming from outside grants, but it will make funding of good programs more consistent.
- ❑ In New Mexico, we have found that Native American lands do not always gain from inclusion in a traditional CWMA. Instead, we have begun organizing neighboring pueblos into CWMAs that work with each other to solve problems and take advantages of opportunities that are unique to Indian lands. The provision for 25% of the funding to be used as incentives to establish new programs would help increase the number of tribes and pueblos participating in weed management programs.
- ❑ Currently, 20 of the 33 counties in New Mexico are organized into CWMAs. The incentive payments will help to increase the percentage of New Mexico lands under active weed management programs. Additionally, the leveraging requirement will help existing CWMAs convince county and municipal governments to increase their financial participation in noxious weed management.
- ❑ New Mexico is faced with managing several species, like African rue and camelthorn, for which successful control methods have not been established. The allowance in the Noxious Weed Control Act to spend up to 8% on research for locally significant weed problems will help develop effective management approaches for these species. This will not only benefit New Mexico, but will be of value throughout the expanding range of these species.

In New Mexico, here are some examples of how we would use the funds available through the Noxious Weed Control Act:

- ❑ Rio Arriba – a program that is being formed this year. The potential of increased funding has helped encourage the extension agent and soil and water conservation district to organize the county into a weed program. They will be addressing leafy spurge and Dalmatian toadflax. The weed coordinator from Archuleta County, Colorado is helping with the organizational effort to limit spread of toadflax across the state line.
- ❑ Taos – a program that is led by a group of citizens against the use of pesticides. This program utilizes non-chemical methods of weed management to try to control noxious weeds growing in the highway rights-of-way.
- ❑ Colfax – This program has been in operation since 1997. The focus of the group is primarily controlling leafy spurge along the Ponil Creek. Unfortunately, the

Cibola National Forest has leafy spurge growing in the headwaters that has not been controlled.

- ❑ Grant – If fully funded, this program could potentially eradicate yellow starthistle from New Mexico within six to seven years.
- ❑ Harding – this program is based almost entirely on preventing noxious weed species from becoming established. They focus entirely on generating public awareness and rapidly responding to any spot infestations that are found.
- ❑ Otero – This program has been managing Russian knapweed, malta starthistle, and African rue since they organized in 1997. They would benefit from funding for research on management techniques for African rue.
- ❑ Sierra and Socorro – Both of these programs have been exemplary in the past, but have suffered from a time crunch created by increased work on controlling saltcedar. If the Noxious Weed Control Act is passed, it will help these two programs increase labor necessary to manage large acreages of saltcedar while simultaneously responding to smaller infestations of other terrestrial noxious weed species.
- ❑ Torrance – This program is dealing almost entirely with infestations on private and state land. Most landowners are willing to supply all the labor and part of the material cost. Money from the Noxious Weed Control Act would likely be used to map the infestations to develop strategies and track progress and to coordinate the program.

Invasive noxious weeds have been described as a raging biological wildfire- out of control and spreading rapidly. The devastation from these alien plants includes enormous economic losses to agriculture and irreparable ecological damage to wildlands. Millions of acres have been invaded or are at risk, including rangelands, forests, wilderness areas, national parks, recreation sites, and wildlife management areas.