

Thank you for this opportunity Chair Geran Tarr and the House Fisheries Committee,

My name is Katherine Schake, and I am a board member of the Alaska Invasive Species Partnership, and am speaking on behalf of the Homer Soil & Water Conservation District and the Kenai Peninsula Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (CISMA) which is a partnership of state & federal agencies, non-profits and Tribes. On the Kenai, we have successfully eradicated elodea from 5 lakes and northern pike from 17 lakes. We maintain a priority invasive plant list to keep the most harmful non-native plants out of our salmon & moose habitat. While eradication efforts for some species have been successful, we are losing the battle with others, like reed canarygrass and orange hawkweed. European Green Crabs (which could destroy our aquaculture efforts in Prince William Sound and Kachemak Bay) are marching northward and were discovered in B.C. last July. Zebra mussels have been found in moss balls sold in aquariums in Anchorage & Soldotna, and cost the lower 48 states millions of dollars annually. As the Coordinator of a high-functioning partnership that has successfully tackled invasive species infestations across the Kenai for the last 17 years, I can say that we are at our limits. We need help to detect and prevent the introduction of new invasive species.

The Soil & Water Conservation Districts are stretched very thin. We write proposals, integrated pest management plans, fundraise, apply for state permits to ensure compliance, and implement control of the most harmful invasive plants along highways and roads – the primary vector of terrestrial invasives. The reason the Seward and Sterling Hwys aren't covered in bird vetch and white sweetclover is because of the CISMA partnership and the Soil & Water Districts. Soil & Water Districts have no state funding and yet we are managing DOT&PF's vegetation in their rights-of-way (ROW) for them. This is not a long-term solution, and it requires so much effort that we don't have the bandwidth to respond when new invasive species show up.

Furthermore, the state's ability to update and maintain a noxious weed list is critical to protecting agriculture and native ecosystems. The Division of Agriculture needs support in order to provide the service of evaluating and prohibiting the sale of harmful plants.

Establishing an invasive species council would help elevate these conversations to a higher level of government and provide a conduit for education about the most pressing threats to our salmon and wildlife habitat. Creating an invasive species council, enabling ADF&G to implement prevention measures, and establishing a fund for rapid response are critical to increase our success of protecting local economies and livelihoods from invasive species. We support HB54 Invasive Species Bill.

Thank you for your time.

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