

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE RESOURCES STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 11, 2008

1:32 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Carl Gatto, Co-Chair
Representative Craig Johnson, Co-Chair
Representative Anna Fairclough
Representative Bob Roses
Representative Paul Seaton
Representative Peggy Wilson
Representative Bryce Edgmon
Representative Scott Kawasaki

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative David Guttenberg

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

HOUSE BILL NO. 330

"An Act relating to management of noxious weeds and invasive plants; establishing the Noxious Weed and Invasive Plant Board; and establishing the noxious weed and invasive plant management fund."

- HEARD AND HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 330

SHORT TITLE: NOXIOUS WEEDS AND INVASIVE PLANTS

SPONSOR(s): RESOURCES

01/17/08	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/17/08	(H)	RES, FIN
02/11/08	(H)	RES AT 1:00 PM BARNES 124

WITNESS REGISTER

JEANNE OSTNESS, Staff
to Representative Craig Johnson
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented the sponsor statement for HB 330 on behalf of the House Resources Standing Committee.

JAMIE NIELSEN, Instructor
Invasive Plants Program
Cooperative Extension Service
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: During hearing on HB 330, presented information regarding noxious weeds and invasive plants.

GINO GRAZIANO, Invasive Plants Program Coordinator
Plant Materials Center
Alaska Association of Conservation Districts
Palmer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: During hearing on HB 330, presented information regarding noxious weeds and invasive plants.

JANIS CHUMLEY
Cooperative Extension Service
University of Alaska Fairbanks
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Kenai, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Supported HB 330.

STEVE SPARROW, Agronomist
School of Natural Resources and Agricultural Sciences
University of Alaska Fairbanks
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Supported HB 330.

STONEY WRIGHT, Manager
Plant Materials Center
Division of Agriculture
Department of Natural Resources
Palmer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Supported HB 330.

BRYCE WRIGLEY
Alaska Farm Bureau
Delta Junction, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Supported HB 330.

OTTO KILCHER
Homer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Supported HB 330.

JEFF HEYS

Alaska Regional Office
U.S. National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Supported HB 330.

ERIC WADE, Executive Director
Alaska Association of Conservation Districts
Wasilla, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Supported HB 330.

BLYTHE BROWN, Noxious and Invasive Plants Coordinator
Kodiak Soil and Water Conservation District
Kodiak, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Supported HB 330.

MATT CARLSON, Assistant Professor of Botany
University of Alaska Anchorage
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Supported HB 330.

LORI ZAUMSEIL
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Supported HB 330.

ACTION NARRATIVE

CO-CHAIR CRAIG JOHNSON called the House Resources Standing Committee meeting to order at [1:32:26 PM](#). Representatives Wilson, Seaton, Roses, Edgmon, Kawasaki, Gatto, and Johnson were present at the call to order. Representative Fairclough arrived as the meeting was in progress.

HB 330-NOXIOUS WEEDS AND INVASIVE PLANTS

[1:32:37 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR JOHNSON announced that the only order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 330, "An Act relating to management of noxious weeds and invasive plants; establishing the Noxious Weed and Invasive Plant Board; and establishing the noxious weed and invasive plant management fund."

CO-CHAIR JOHNSON noted that HB 330 is a House Resources Standing Committee bill, but he is the one who brought it forward as the result of a constituent complaint from this past summer. The

constituent purchased a strawberry plant at a box store and subsequently found an invasive plant species [Canada thistle] in the container. In researching the issue it was found that nothing could be done and this is the reason for bringing forward HB 330.

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JEANNE OSTNESS, Staff to Representative Craig Johnson, Alaska State Legislature, presented the sponsor statement for HB 330 on behalf of the House Resources Standing Committee. She said HB 330 would establish both a Noxious Weed and Invasive Plant Board and an invasive plant management fund. Alaska is currently in the enviable position of having a prevention status and even a control status on statewide weeds. While Alaska has early detection and rapid response ability in some cases, there is no statewide plan for noxious weeds, she said. This past summer the Committee for Noxious & Invasive Plants Management (CNIPM) brought forward [suggested] changes to state regulations which the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is now looking at. The federal government will provide funds to the state if there is a state plan, a coordinator, and regulations indicating specific weeds, she related. Alaska is 60 percent federal land, 12 percent Native land, 28 percent state land, and 1 percent private land - thus, there is a need for interagency response throughout the state.

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JAMIE NIELSEN, Instructor, Invasive Plants Program, Cooperative Extension Service, explained that the Committee for Noxious & Invasive Plants Management (CNIPM) is a statewide organization addressing invasive plant prevention and management. She chairs this eight-year-old committee made up of about 400 people from over 100 organizations statewide. She noted that many invasive plant species have not made it to Alaska from the Lower 48, but species from other countries have.

MS. NIELSEN began her PowerPoint presentation by pointing out that invasive plants can impact agriculture, tourism, wildlife, fisheries, subsistence resources, and land values [slide 2]. Under Executive Order 13112, the federal government defines an invasive plant as an intentionally or unintentionally introduced non-native plant that has the potential to cause or causes economic or environmental harm or harm to human health.

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MS. NIELSEN noted that there are ranches in the Lower 48 so infested with spotted knapweed [slide 3] that it would cost more to eradicate the knapweed than what the ranch would sell for. Spotted knapweed has now spread to nearly six million acres in Montana and costs that state \$14 million per year in direct economic impacts. Alaska has spotted knapweed in a couple of locations in Southeast Alaska and in three locations on the Turnagain Arm. Now is the opportunity for Alaska to do something about it and save some money, she pointed out.

MS. NIELSEN explained that purple loosestrife is a plant that clogs wetlands and blocks fish passage [slide 4]. Control efforts for purple loosestrife in the Lower 48 cost the U.S. economy \$45 million per year. Because of its fishing industry, Alaska has a lot more to lose from this plant than the rest of the nation, she warned. Alaska's first known infestation of purple loosestrife was found in Anchorage's Westchester Lagoon. Given the cost of this weed to the rest of the U.S., now is a great opportunity to control the purple loosestrife on this one-quarter acre area, she advised.

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MS. NIELSEN said she is presenting only three examples of invasive species in order to keep her presentation brief, but there are many more species. She turned to her third example, leafy spurge, a species that costs agricultural producers and taxpayers in the Dakotas, Montana, and Wyoming \$144 million per year [slide 5]. It produces a caustic latex sap that if introduced into the eye causes blindness and if eaten causes blisters in the mouth and irritation in the digestive tract which can result in mortality. She said the good news is that leafy spurge is not yet in Alaska, but the bad news is that there is now a thriving population on the road system in Canada just outside of the Alaska border. Would it not be great to have a state management plan to prevent and deal with the leafy spurge before it gets to Alaska's interior, she asked. Better yet, would it not be great to have access to federal funding to prevent this type of thing? To get that federal funding, Alaska would need to have a management plan in place.

[1:45:40 PM](#)

MS. NIELSEN explained that noxious and invasive species have "Rambo-like" characteristics - the ability to adapt quickly and produce their own herbicides. These are not your typical garden

weeds, she stressed. They thrive on multiple continents and cause much economic loss and damage to natural resources. She explained that after introduction in a harbor or other point of entry, there is an ensuing period called lag phase where the weed germinates and grows quietly for a couple of years or sometimes decades. This is followed by an explosive growth phase [slide 6]. Alaska has only a few plants, such as Canada thistle, that are in the explosive growth phase, she said. For the most part, Alaska has small incipient populations of species like purple loosestrife and spotted knapweed that are still in the lag phase. States like the Dakotas would give anything to be in Alaska's shoes right now, she related, and those states would tell Alaska to take the opportunity to get prevention and management measures in place before these species reach the landscape level.

[1:47:32 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR GATTO asked whether the graph axis labeled "increasing time" on slide 6 represents months, years, or decades.

MS. NIELSEN responded it varies based on species. Canada thistle reached Alaska and immediately went into the explosive phase. Purple loosestrife was a staple of the horticulture industry that was planted by gardeners for at least two decades, but it was only three years ago that purple loosestrife was discovered infesting a wetland in Anchorage. Sometimes a species needs to find the right complement of soil microbes or be discovered by a pollinator, she said, and sometimes genetic diversity needs to happen through a couple of generations before the weed hits that explosive growth phase.

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CO-CHAIR GATTO commented that a couple of years ago there was legislation dealing with purple loosestrife and orange hawkweed on Kodiak Island. He inquired whether the loosestrife is from Kodiak Island or elsewhere.

MS. NIELSEN answered that purple loosestrife is throughout the state. She said she thinks orange hawkweed is what started the Kodiak legislation and purple loosestrife was tacked onto that. Each purple loosestrife plant produces millions of seeds the size of ground pepper and the seeds move on waterfowl, in mud, and flow on currents. Therefore, she warned, Anchorage's purple loosestrife could easily be on the Kenai Peninsula this spring.

1:50:05 PM

CO-CHAIR GATTO asked whether the intentional planting of a noxious or invasive species violates anything at the moment.

MS. NIELSEN responded that the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has added orange hawkweed and purple loosestrife to its prohibited and restricted noxious weed lists, but there is no enforcement at this time. Most of what applies to those lists are agricultural seed regulations.

CO-CHAIR JOHNSON said in years past, individual legislation has had to be introduced in order to put a weed on the list. This problem would be solved by HB 330 because the Noxious Weed and Invasive Plant Board would have this ability without having to come back for legislation every year and would thus be able to keep the list updated. A second problem is that there is nowhere to go to find out whether planting a noxious or invasive species is a violation of some kind and this problem would also be solved by establishing the board.

1:51:53 PM

MS. NIELSEN noted that Alaska was unable to access funding from the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) a couple of years ago because of not having an updated statewide weed list. States like Oregon that have statewide management plans in place receive \$200,000 - \$300,000 a year from the BLM. One aim of HB 330 is to make Alaska eligible for receiving this funding. For the past seven years, she said, CNIPM has been laying the groundwork - the "what", "where", and "why" - for the day Alaska is empowered to take a role in invasive plant prevention and management. A three-year-long, multi-agency, multi-stakeholder project was undertaken to determine "what" the problem is [slide 8], she related. Funded by state and private forestry, the project reviewed over 100 species and gave them an invasiveness ranking. All of this information and research is now in one place and accessible online as to which plants have the potential to be a problem for Alaskan resources under the growing conditions in this state. The Alaska Exotic Plants Information Clearinghouse (AKEPIC) has mapped 63,000 data points indicating "where" these identified species can be found in the state [slide 9]. The map and information are a phenomenal tool and are available online, Ms. Nielsen said. There is now a good idea, at least along the state's road systems and in the population centers, of where these plants are located and where they are moving. Creating public awareness is important so

people know "why" noxious and invasive plants are a threat to Alaska and why they should care [slide 10]. Many states did not become proactive about noxious weeds until residents felt the impacts in their pocketbooks. She pointed out that Alaska has the unique opportunity to be proactive about the introduction and spread of invasives. The Cooperative Extension Service, Alaska Association of Conservation Districts, and other folks have worked for seven years to increase public awareness and understanding so that public support would be in place when the state was ready to take a role.

1:55:06 PM

GINO GRAZIANO, Invasive Plants Program Coordinator, Plant Materials Center, Alaska Association of Conservation Districts, stated that he helps the association coordinate programs and set up local groups to manage invasive plants within cooperative weed management areas. He is also vice chair of the CNIPM board. At Co-Chair Johnson's request, the CNIPM board came up with recommendations for holistically managing invasive plants in Alaska. He understood that these recommendations were also used for the development of HB 330.

MR. GRAZIANO said CNIPM's first recommendation is that a Noxious and Invasive Plant Management Program be developed within the Department of Natural Resources [slide 11]. One function of this program would be to establish and implement regulations dealing with invasive plants. However, he noted, there is currently no money and no staff available to even implement existing regulations, such as conducting inspections for noxious and invasive species contained in plant starts that are sold at big box stores. Another function of the program would be to develop a Statewide Weed Management Plan, which is a prerequisite for receiving federal funds under the federal Noxious Weed Control and Eradication Act. Additionally under this program, DNR could promote coordination between agencies. Coordination is paramount for effective management, he said, because one species of invasive weed can have the ability to invade lands that are managed by any one of the state's departments or divisions. The department could also work with soil and water conservation districts to assist and provide incentives to private landowners. Oftentimes invasive plants start out on private property and other times private landowners are in the middle where roadside weeds jump onto private property and then into a wetland or other public lands. He said the state needs to help private landowners and natural resource producers to manage invasive plants on their private property in

a way that is not heavy handed. Putting the Noxious and Invasive Plant Management Program within DNR seems to be a natural fit because the department is in charge of multiple divisions that manage state lands, including the Division of Agriculture where the state's current weed laws reside.

[1:59:24 PM](#)

MS. NIELSEN, in response to Representative Wilson, identified the plant shown on slide 11 as a bull thistle that was found south of Anchorage and that had already gone to seed. In further response, she noted that there are two types of thistle found in Alaska and the plant shown on slide 12 is a Canada thistle.

CO-CHAIR GATTO asked whether there is any thistle that is not noxious.

MS. NIELSEN replied yes, there are native species of thistle that are important for pollinators and forage. However, bull and Canada thistle have the capacity to out-compete all surrounding vegetation, so they are much more aggressive in Alaska's environment.

[2:00:46 PM](#)

MR. GRAZIANO continued his presentation. He reported that CNIPM's second recommendation is to appoint a State Weed Coordinator for the program within DNR and to provide the coordinator with administrative support. The coordinator would help with public outreach and education because invasive plants cannot be managed without letting people know what they need to look out for and what they should avoid buying in catalogs. Additionally, letting the public know who to contact should an invasive plant be found can save the state a lot of time and money as well as preventing a problem from happening.

[2:01:43 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON observed that the \$5,000 identified in the fiscal note for statewide outreach seems too light for covering the entire state.

MR. GRAZIANO explained that outreach does not necessarily involve travel because there are local groups throughout the state that could receive support in ways other than travel. For instance, one type of support would be the development of

materials. Also, he said, Ms. Nielsen travels to many remote places.

MS. NIELSEN added that there is a big infestation of Canada thistle in Cold Bay and she just taught a tele-class for the 13 tribal offices of the Aleutian Pribilof Islands Association. She sent a PowerPoint presentation ahead of time and then, via telephone, she talked about best management practices for operating heavy equipment on projects like runway expansion and tank farm construction, including writing those practices into contracts. For instance, one practice is the requirement that heavy equipment be cleaned before being taken to a remote site in order to prevent the spreading of weeds.

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MR. GRAZIANO continued his discussion about a state coordinator. This coordinator would also work with the soil and water conservation districts in supporting the establishment of the cooperative weed management areas in the state, he explained. These weed management areas often work off of federal grants that require matching funds from the state and the coordinator could help facilitate that. The coordinator could also work with other statewide groups such as the Committee for Noxious and Invasive Plant Management and the Alaska Invasive Species Working Group. Additionally, research is needed on how to effectively kill noxious plants without damaging other resources, as well as the conducting of surveys.

MR. GRAZIANO said CNIPM's third recommendation is to create a State Weed Board with representation from a broad range of stakeholders. This broad range of stakeholders is necessary because there are so many different affected parties in addition to government agencies - for example, the fishing, agricultural, and horticultural industries. The State Weed Board would provide recommendations to state agencies and having everyone at the table would provide the ability to talk about and address the problems, such as: mowing roadsides by the Department of Transportation & Public Facilities, cleaning equipment in between construction projects, and ensuring that revegetation material does not contain noxious invasive plants. These sorts of recommendations can be put into a statewide weed management plan, he advised. The State Weed Board would seek outside funding for state weed prevention and management efforts. The Weed Board would also suggest any needed regulation changes. For instance, the list of noxious and invasive species is

severely out of date and many species should be considered for addition to the list.

MS. NIELSEN interjected that plants can be taken off the list, as well.

MR. GRAZIANO noted that a clear plan is required for putting plants on the list. The list must be organized according to whether a listing is in regard to prevention, which plants are not yet in the state, which plants need to be eradicated, and which plants simply need to be controlled or contained.

[2:09:36 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR JOHNSON inquired whether it would work to have HB 330 designate the CNIPM board as the State Weed Board and appoint the commissioner of the Department of Natural Resources as the director.

MR. GRAZIANO responded that the CNIPM board is elected by its members at its annual conference. He said he is unsure whether this would make a difference in the way the board would run because there may be a need for the State Weed Board members to be of state agencies and politically appointed.

CO-CHAIR JOHNSON commented that he wants to solve the problem without creating more bureaucracy and he will therefore be looking at some alternatives. He said he also has concerns about the fiscal note.

[2:11:37 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON asked whether it would be beneficial to pass a bill that requires all contractors to wash equipment prior to moving to a new construction site.

MS. NIELSEN replied some states do have such laws, especially islands like Hawaii that are really impacted by invasive species. However, she said, some people believe such specifics belong in regulations instead of state law.

MR. GRAZIANO advised that passing such legislation could take longer than just having the different stakeholders meet to discuss the issue and make internal policy changes that DOT&PF then writes into its contracts. Such contract policies could include requirements that equipment be cleaned in between uses

and before going to a new site, and that fill material and revegetation mix be free of invasive weeds.

MS. NIELSEN added that another contract policy could be that assurity is not released until the site is inspected 24 months later. Being one of the later states to address this issue, Alaska has a lot of templates that can be used. These are the types of recommendations and regulations that a State Weed Board would debate and suggest to the state agencies.

CO-CHAIR JOHNSON interjected that such legislation is an extreme measure that is currently taken in some of the Great Lakes states for boats that move from one lake to another. He said his opinion is that regulation is a better way to go.

[2:14:31 PM](#)

MR. GRAZIANO summarized the need for a State Weed Board [slide 14]. Coordination is imperative to properly manage invasive plants because weeds do not respect property boundaries. The groundwork has been laid for a board and a state program to hit the ground running and make really big impacts in a very short amount of time. An overarching system of support from the state is needed to assist the grassroots groups that have already been organized. That top down level is needed to add more "oomph" to what is already being done. Alaska does not need to reinvent the wheel because it can use the lessons, losses, and gains from the other states as templates for success. If Alaska acts now to safeguard its resources and economy it will not have to spend \$14 million on just one weed.

MR. GRAZIANO said citizens across the state are working in their communities to manage invasive plants by conducting weed pulls, surveys, and providing education programs. But these citizens need help. He quoted Troy and Lori Zaumseil, a couple who found an invasive species in a strawberry start that they purchased from a big box store in Anchorage: "It takes a state to stop a weed." He concluded his presentation with a photograph of Japanese Knotweed growing on a beach in Southeast Alaska [slide 16] and explained that this invasive species takes over the sites where salmonberries grow.

[2:18:14 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON surmised by the quote that this problem is so pervasive that it requires being proactive and having the state play a substantial role such as what is in HB 330.

MS. NIELSEN answered yes, Alaska has the opportunity to save a huge amount of money. There is example after example across Canada and the Lower 48 states. An invasive reed in one Santa Ana, California, watershed has already cost that state over \$20 million and the reed is not yet under control. The city of Seattle, Washington, is not focused on prevention, it is focused on restoration that costs millions of dollars. Alaska can focus on prevention. Citizens across Alaska are doing what they can, but if there is no overarching system of support from the state it will be a losing battle.

[2:20:03 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON drew attention to the fiscal note of \$232,000. He remarked that part of the policy question is how much money the state wants to put into tackling this problem on a statewide basis.

CO-CHAIR JOHNSON responded he is sensitive to that, but he would like to see the fiscal note go down and have the state take advantage of the citizen groups and not create another level of bureaucracy.

[2:21:03 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR GATTO inquired about the frequency of travel and the per diem costs that would be incurred by the nine member Noxious Weed and Invasive Plant Board.

MS. NIELSEN spoke from her experience on the CNIPM board. She said this board meets via teleconference except for one annual meeting that takes place in either Anchorage or Fairbanks. She offered to ask the other western state weed coordinators what their travel and per diem costs are when their boards convene.

[2:22:06 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR GATTO recollected that several years ago per diem was changed to \$400 per day, plus the hotel and airfare. The fiscal note would not actually pay for weed control, he said.

MS. NIELSEN related that the function of weed boards in other states is not to travel around conducting treatment themselves, but to advise state agencies, help keep the state weed list up-to-date, create an updated state weed management plan that includes prevention and best management practices, and solicit

federal funds for delegation to on-the-ground weed control projects in the state.

MR. GRAZIANO added that the planning being done at the local level ought to remain local. Local groups know better what needs to happen in those areas and several of them are already working on developing strategic management plans for noxious and invasive weeds. For example, the Kenai Peninsula Cooperative Weed Management Area has a completed plan that is online at www.homerswcd.org.

[2:26:21 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ROSES asked what the potential amount of federal dollars is and how much the state would be expected to contribute.

MS. NIELSEN answered there are no specifics in the bill. Different states have different agreements. Grant monies are available from the U.S. Federal Highway Administration, the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, and one of the three branches of the U.S. Forest Service. Without a statewide weed management plan, Alaska cannot apply for any of those federal funds. That is the idea behind getting a board in place, she said.

[2:27:36 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ROSES inquired whether Ms. Nielsen had an estimate of how much is potentially available through this grant process. He expressed his concern about creating something to seek federal dollars and then having the federal grants disappear. Are there other federal funding sources in addition to the grants, he asked.

MS. NIELSEN related that the state of Montana set up a program using a seed money grant and is now funding the program through interest received from either a tobacco tax or license plates. The state of Oregon receives about \$200,000-\$300,000 from the U.S. Bureau of Land Management. She said that going into the numbers for the amount of federal funds can be intimidating, whereas having a State Weed Board in place to develop a management plan does not have to be expensive. California provides \$1.5 million annually in state money to its cooperative weed management areas and Idaho provides about \$10 million annually. However, she emphasized, this is not to say that the state of Alaska has to provide millions of dollars because

Alaska's infestations have not reached the landscape level and prevention is not that expensive.

2:30:25 PM

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON commented that the coordinator's position, as outlined, would be a huge job.

MS. NIELSEN answered that the coordinator should be able to fall back on the expertise of the members of the state board. Also, there are templates that are available and can be used for the statewide weed management plan, and for the priorities within the plan, and for a system of accountability within the plan.

MS. NIELSEN, in response to Co-Chair Gatto, confirmed that burning noxious and invasive weeds is one tool in the toolbox of integrated vegetation management that can be very effective in combination with other treatments. She noted that bird vetch, an invasive species depicted in a 1/22/08 letter to Representative Kawasaki, uses the strategy of smothering [other plants]. Once seeds are in the soil they can germinate for a number of years. In addition to covering and smothering fences, bird vetch smothers crops. Bird vetch has spread on the road system from Fairbanks all the way to the Kenai and is closing in on Delta Junction.

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON asked whether there is a need to add the word fisheries to line 9, page 1, under the section on state policy.

MS. NIELSEN responded absolutely, there are invasives blocking fish passage in Anchorage and in Southeast Alaska. Fisheries and subsistence are two big ones for Alaska, she said.

2:36:04 PM

JANIS CHUMLEY, University of Alaska Fairbanks, Cooperative Extension Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, urged that something happen soon. She supported establishment of a State Weed Board. There needs to be legislation or some kind of authority to deal with this problem that is not going to go away, she said. Funding is always an issue, but putting it off will result in the continued growth and spread of these weeds. Alaska has a lot riding on this - its wildlife, fishing, and pristine beauty. To do nothing is to do our future disservice. It will create a liability to the state's residents and result in Alaska having to do what is being done in the Lower 48, such

as mechanical and chemical control. It is wise to address the situation now while it is still a controllable situation, she stressed.

[2:38:07 PM](#)

STEVE SPARROW, Agronomist, School of Natural Resources and Agricultural Sciences, University of Alaska Fairbanks, related that he recently participated in an assessment of potential effects of climate warming on agriculture in Alaska. The assessment concluded that climate warming would have a positive impact on agriculture in high latitude areas such as Alaska. However, there would be some negative effects and one of those negative effects would be more weed species coming into the state. Anything that can be done to prevent weeds from coming into Alaska is a good thing and HB 330 is a step in the right direction.

[2:39:53 PM](#)

STONEY WRIGHT, Manager, Plant Materials Center, Division of Agriculture, Department of Natural Resources, said the Department of Natural Resources fully supports HB 330 and the development of a strategic plan. He noted that the bill has two fiscal notes - one for the Plant Materials Center and one for the commissioner's office.

[2:40:34 PM](#)

BRYCE WRIGLEY, Alaska Farm Bureau, stated that as a farmer he is concerned because some of the weed lists being used include species like brome and timothy that are not native to Alaska, but which are used as crops in the state. Including brome and timothy on the weed list would create a problem because they account for 80 percent of the sales of hay grown in the state. Agriculture must have input to the State Weed Board and to this process, he said. He proposed that the board seat for the commissioner of the Department of Natural Resources be specifically a representative from the Division of Agriculture. Since the division is ultimately the final say in what species make the list, it would be better for the division to be part of the decision making process. He drew attention to page 2, line 11, and urged that the State Weed Board member who is an employee from the University of Alaska be a cooperative extension agent or someone involved in research. Additionally, he suggested that one of the three seats for public members as designated on page 2, line 13, be filled by a representative

from the Alaska Farm Bureau or some other farm organization so there can be input from agricultural concerns.

MR. WRIGLEY said it is clear from the information presented today that it is not a matter of can or should this be done, but a matter that it has to be done. Outside states are spending millions and millions of dollars to control single weeds. For example, a few years ago California had to turn its back on 17 million acres of star thistle because it could not afford the control measures and now nothing is being done. He said Alaska can take advantage of the lessons that have been learned Outside and it would be foolish to debate this and lose time. Some weeds will respond to pulling and some will not, so chemicals will have to be part of the treatment, he advised. It took 18 years to successfully eradicate Canada thistle in Delta Junction. With concerted and continuous effort, Alaska can be successful, he said.

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OTTO KILCHER said he is on the board of supervisors for the Soil and Water Conservation District, but that he is speaking on behalf of himself as someone who has been involved in weeds for many years. Bull thistle grew in some feed that came into his sister's place, he related. The head of a bull thistle can be as big as a tennis ball and spikes on the plant can be up to an inch long. It gets into tires and can cause injury to people. He said he does not want to see any bureaucracy get overloaded; however, when looking at the short- and long-term costs for eradication, a little money and pesticide now is much better than a lot of money and pesticide later. Some kind of a board or small bureaucracy is needed to take charge and work with the grassroots people. There is huge support for eradication, but people do not know where to go, he said. If there was one place where the buck stops and someone answers at the state level, all of the bureaucracy could be short-circuited and proper information could be easily disseminated. For example, when the highway between Indian and Girdwood was redone, the contractor planted white sweet clover. This is a species that is choking out the Stikine River in Southeast Alaska. There is currently no clearinghouse for informing greenhouses and other importers, such as big box stores, as to which species should not be imported. Mr. Kilcher noted that horses and dogs are vectors that spread weeds in the wilderness because of weed seeds found in their feed. His neighbors raise [certified] weed free hay for feeding to horses used for backcountry packing and if other farmers in Alaska did this it would be a boon to the economy

because then weed free hay would not have to be imported. Federal agencies and wildlife professionals need the state's help. Putting this together would form a framework that additional species, such as agricultural and aquatic pests, could fall under. He urged the state to take a proactive step.

2:51:17 PM

JEFF HEYS, Alaska Regional Office, U.S. National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, stated that he has been in Alaska for 10 years and has spent the past 5 years managing a program to keep invasive plants out of Alaska's 16 national parks. He works with Ms. Nielsen, Mr. Graziano, and the CNIPM group to share information about this issue. Park personnel in the other states envy his position, he said, because they are fighting an uphill battle with few victories in trying to save the scraps of uninvaded land and trying to keep the next invader from overrunning the land. Alaska's national parks are currently at the opposite end of the spectrum and there is the ability to search for and destroy small populations of these invasive plants in hopes that Alaska will not have to face a larger problem. He said the U.S. National Park Service is concerned about the potential impacts to fish and wildlife habitat, the replacement of native plant communities, the change of water flow and quality, and the change of wildfire frequency and intensity. Problems outside of parks will likely include reduced crop and forage productivity, increased landscaping and lawn maintenance costs, and thorny and toxic plants that nobody likes to have around. It cannot be overstated that Alaska has the opportunity to avoid these problems on the scale that other states have experienced, he stressed. This can only be through strategic and coordinated management. It is clear from U.S. National Park Service efforts in Alaska that every \$1 dollar spent on current management will save \$1000 later. The U.S. National Park Service looks forward to cooperating with the state, other federal agencies, and nongovernment entities in protecting Alaska from this threat into the future, he said. It is a serious problem that is not going to go away and will never be any cheaper to deal with than now.

2:53:30 PM

ERIC WADE, Executive Director, Alaska Association of Conservation Districts, stated that the [Alaska] Association of Conservation Districts voted on January 12, 2008, to strongly support HB 330. The association wants to play a part and would like the language to be amended to include the association in

the bill by name. The soil and water districts are entities of the state, he explained, and in the past several years these weed programs have become major components of programs the districts offer. The legislation, as currently written, is nested in AS 41.10 which is the same statute that authorizes districts. He said he is testifying from Reno, Nevada, where he is attending a national meeting of associations of conservation districts and every speaker has talked about invasive plants, usually in the context of climate change. The key theme has been the wish that involvement had begun 30-50 years ago. Alaska has the opportunity to "get that ball rolling now" with the passage of HB 330.

[2:55:32 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SEATON asked whether the current language on page 2, lines 8-9, is ample for the inclusion of Mr. Wade's organization.

MR. WADE said his organization would request to be specifically named on page 4, paragraph 7, line 3. The [Alaska] Association of Conservation Districts strongly feels it is in an excellent position to deliver programs around the state and has the experience in this area. In further response to Representative Seaton, Mr. Wade confirmed that his association is in favor of having one member of the [Noxious Weed and Invasive Plant Board] selected by the soil and water conservation districts.

[2:57:29 PM](#)

BLYTHE BROWN, Noxious and Invasive Plants Coordinator, Kodiak Soil and Water Conservation District, testified that she has been working with invasive plants in Kodiak since 2002 when orange hawkweed was discovered on Camp Island in the Kodiak National Wildlife Refuge. She now works with weed education and control throughout the Kodiak Island Borough. She encouraged committee members to reread the sponsor statement to HB 330 because it is well written and states the problem effectively. Federal, state, and local private organizations are working together in Kodiak, but more help and guidance is needed from the state level, she said. The State of Alaska needs to officially acknowledge that, yes, invasive plants are a major threat to its natural resources, agricultural production, and communities, and that something needs to be done now. Alaska can prevent the major expenses other states now have to pay because of their failure to act when the infestations were still small. Invasive plants have the potential to be just as

devastating to Alaska's resources and habitats as an oil spill or a tsunami, she warned. Just as people work together to prevent oil spills and prepare for tsunamis, people can also prevent invasive plant infestations and quickly react to control them when they are first discovered. She clarified that Kodiak does not have purple loosestrife right now and the hope is to keep it that way. Together we can make a difference, she said.

[2:59:35 PM](#)

MATT CARLSON, Assistant Professor of Botany, University of Alaska Anchorage, noted that he is a CNIPM board member and has been involved in the invasiveness ranking and the state's weed database. He supports HB 330, he said. It is a misconception that Alaska's extreme climate makes it immune to the problem of invasives. Alaska currently has close to 300 nonnative plants and each year more and more of these plants are escaping from the road systems, gardens, and agricultural settings and getting into natural systems. These natural systems are what Alaska prides itself on and much of the state's economy and tourism is based on the purity of its ecosystem. Weeds are biological pollution. The state needs to spend money and take charge of the matter now, he advised, as weeds are worse than lots of other forms of pollution because they self replicate and have the ability to mutate and invade new places.

[3:01:37 PM](#)

LORI ZAUMSEIL stated that she and her husband were the people who found the Canada thistle [in a store-bought plant start], so they have been involved in this from the very beginning. She said she is working hard to educate citizens that spending a nickel now and saving a dollar later is the fiscally responsible thing to do. Alaska needs to prepare and protect herself now because it will only become more costly and eventually impossible to do this later. She compared it to watching a wildfire coming across the horizon and not yet filling a water bucket. Alaska must exploit the advantage that it has right now. She said she and her husband will be speaking at the end of the month in Washington, DC, at the opening session for the National Invasive Weeds Awareness Week and they want to take the message that Alaska has been proactive in this fight. She urged committee members to take to heart what they have heard today.

[3:03:15 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR JOHNSON closed public testimony and held HB 330.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Resources Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 3:03 p.m.