



# California Agricultural Commissioners and Sealers Association

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## Issue Fact Sheet

**Issue:** Noxious and invasive weeds continue to proliferate on public and private lands throughout California. Many public and private land managers are addressing this problem, but the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) has not been able to adequately address this problem in California due to the lack of “Invasive Species Management” NEPA analysis for most forests and a lack of resources. According to the California Invasive Plant Council estimates, \$82,000,000 is spent annually to control noxious weeds that infest millions of acres in California. Left unmanaged, weeds on USFS lands create a reservoir of noxious weeds that proliferate and spread to private and non-federal public lands. This increases costs for private landowners and for state and local weed management programs. Owners of livestock are impacted as they often cannot graze ruminant animals, and frequent users of public land are disappointed with declining forest productivity, loss of wildlife habitat and loss of recreational opportunities.

**Background:** The USFS manages 20 million acres of National Forest land in California. Eighteen national forests are located in Region V. Thirty-nine of California’s 58 counties have lands maintained by the USFS.

California County Agricultural Commissioners (CAC), along with the California Department of Food & Agriculture (CDFA), have the responsibility to protect resource, recreational, and wildlands from the threat of noxious and invasive weeds. Both counties and the state have had effective programs in place for decades based on the concept of “Early Detection, Rapid Response.” Often times these programs are carried in cooperation with local weed management area groups, non-Government organizations (NGO), and public and private land managers. All groups typically contribute financial resources to these efforts.

Given the proximity of USFS land in California to the inter-mountain west and the volume of truck traffic entering the state, these areas are at serious risk for continual weed introduction. CACs are concerned about infestations of serious weed pests such as Scotch Thistle, Leafy Spurge, Scotch Broom, Diffuse and Spotted Knapweeds to name just a few. These species can seriously reduce the productivity on grazing and pasture lands, infest hay fields and timberlands, make recreational areas almost unusable by the public and displace native flora and fauna.

Some of the work carried out by the CACs has historically taken place on public lands including USFS managed lands. Approximately ten years ago the USFS halted most of the work done by the CACs because the appropriate NEPA documentation had not been completed on many forests. Since that time very little of the NEPA analysis has been completed frustrating CACs, neighboring landowners whose lands become infested by invasives spreading from adjacent USFS lands, and even USFS land managers and scientists.

**Status:** CACs have been meeting with Region V officials periodically for many years. On December 3, 2009, County Agricultural Commissioners met with USFS officials to discuss ways to effectively partner in the future on issues including early detection, rapid response, control and treatment of invasive weeds found in USFS Region V, the Pacific Southwest Region. USFS officials committed to continual and regular meetings with state and county officials to develop and

implement USFS's 2004 "National Strategy and Implementation Plan for Invasive Species Management" as well as the USFS's 2000 Regional Noxious Weed Strategy" throughout the state. Because of the decentralized management of each forest it has been difficult to address this on a statewide basis. Staffing changes have also hampered efforts to work cooperatively with staff from Region V headquarters.

On December 8, 2009 California's U.S. Senator Barbara Boxer led a group of her U.S. Senate colleagues in signing a letter to President Obama asking that he prioritize increased funding for the U.S. Forest Service to create jobs in the areas of forest management in his upcoming FY 2011 budget. The letter emphasized that from 1998 to 2008, the Forest Service budget was cut by as much as 40 percent. These cuts have resulted in a lack of forest management and a remarkable loss of jobs in many rural forest regions."

Representatives from the USFS and CACASA have continued to meet in 2010. Both parties agreed to work together to draft a Memorandum of Understanding to memorialize the commitment to work cooperatively to address this problem. A meeting was held in Redding in November and a final draft was developed. That document is under final review by both parties and should be finalized in 2011.

**Action Item:** USFS budgets for invasive weed control and management need to be increased. In 2010 the California Agricultural Commissioners and Sealers Association submitted an appropriations request for \$1.295 million to complete Environmental Assessments in six national forests including: Cleveland, El Dorado, Inyo, Klamath, Tahoe and San Bernardino. While most Region V forests are very much engaged in cooperative efforts to control invasive species, these six forests were selected because they are best positioned to complete the environmental planning and documentation required by NEPA in the near future, allowing for the implementation of projects soon. Three of these forests are located in some of the most economically depressed regions in California and such focus meets USDA's National Forest Service (NFS) goal of "re-establishing vibrant local economies." Because of Congress' self-imposed moratorium on congressionally-directed spending, CACASA will not be requesting appropriations for EA's.

USDA is proposing \$1.7 billion in total funding of NFS in their FY 2012 budget, an increase of \$154 million above FY 2011 level. Of the total amount, \$854 million is proposed for the Integrated Resource Restoration (IRR), which includes Vegetation and Watershed Management programs such as treatment of noxious weeds and invasive plants. While IRR funding is being increased, the acreage of noxious weeds and invasive plants treated is decreasing. Consider the FY 2010 target was 212,581 acres, which is 91,525 acres LESS THAN the actual number of 304,106 acres treated in FY 2009.

USDA should commit additional resources to noxious weed management in US Forest Service Region 5.