

CEIPSC Spurs Federal Funding for Invasive Weed Control

By Jim Bean, BASF Environmental Resource Specialist

Jim Bean has been working on invasive species issues for 27 years. He helped form the Coalition for Invasive Plant Species Control (CEIPSC) in order to define a cohesive strategy to increase federal funding for weed control initiatives, and has helped prepare Eastern weed experts to speak with their Congressional delegations about important legislation under review in 2007.

Even if you line up the best scientific information, the best coalition and the best on-the-ground control methods for invasive weeds, you still have one last hurdle to jump. You must have sufficient funding to get the job done. Many of our best ideas about how to stop the spread of invasive weeds never come to fruition because coalitions lack the financial resources to move forward with control projects.

Among the funding options available are appropriations from federal laws or agencies. The hurdle in many cases is actually getting that funding out of Washington, D.C., and to the front lines of weed control initiatives. Legislators and agency personnel need to understand how the funds that weed control groups need fit into their national, regional and local agendas, and how they can talk to constituents about their decisions. Landowners must be armed with the right tools to get decision-makers to commit money.

To help meet that need for information at a regional level the Coalition for Eastern Invasive Plant Species Control (CEIPSC) was formed in 2006. The group's mission is to serve as an agent for public policy change through an interdisciplinary approach to weed control, educating decision-makers about the threat of invasive weeds, and providing stakeholders with the resources they need to make a real difference. Southeast EPPC leadership, including President Tony Pernas, have been involved in CEIPSC since the outset, and provide important counsel as the organization develops.

Dozens of new faces joined Congress in 2007 from throughout the Southeast.

Many returning Southeastern senators and representatives are now in positions of power on important committees such as Agriculture, Appropriations, Resources, Environment and Energy. These leaders need to know the facts about the economic and ecological impact of invasive weeds on forest land throughout the region. CEIPSC provides materials to help landowners get the message to the Hill.

CEIPSC does this by providing training sessions, handouts, success stories and other news to its members via online meetings and its Web site, www.ceipsc.org. Online meetings make it possible for people to meet without leaving their offices. The only requirements are an Internet connection and a telephone for a toll-free call. The Web site contains past presentations, weed-specific handouts that can be tailored with local information, success stories and upcoming meeting information, as well as tutorials for people who have not worked with elected officials. All these resources are available at no charge to anyone with an interest. No membership or registration process is required.

This year's National Invasive Weed Awareness Week (NIWAW) gave invasive weed experts from around the country an opportunity to talk with legislators and agency staff at the highest levels. The NIWAW committee annually sets legislative priorities for attendees to discuss with elected officials. CEIPSC mirrors this process by having its members vote on various bills to determine the top priorities members should talk about when they meet with legislators.

Of primary importance in the 2007 session is the Farm Bill, which Congress

will be re-authorizing. The nation has been buzzing about this for months and there have been many different views about what will eventually happen with this vast appropriations bill. Though most of the funding in the Farm Bill is used to enhance and support production agriculture, programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP), the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) and the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP) provide millions of dollars for land managers to protect habitat around the country.

Like all other Farm Bill programs, the conservation programs are being evaluated to ensure they are regulated and funded properly into the future. According to farm industry experts, the demand for ethanol may drive a reduction in the number of acres that can be set aside for conservation. This could have a significant impact on landowners managing their property for recreation, hunting and wildlife habitat who have taken advantage of CRP in the past. Though nothing is set in stone, it is important to make your voice heard about protecting this and other conservation programs.

A key strategy that land managers can use is to keep members of the House and Senate Agriculture and environmental committees informed of the potential threat to conservation programs if the Farm Bill changes significantly. It is important for vegetation managers to make sure Congressional representatives have information about economic impacts and land protection to ensure adequate funding for the future. Remember, politics is local—

if you can inform legislators about the impact invasive weeds have in their home district, it will help them lead the charge to protect or expand programs.

Another important initiative CEIPSC members addressed with elected officials is S.241/HR 658, the “Natural Resource Protection Cooperative Agreement Act” of 2007. This bill allows one of the biggest federal agencies—the National Park Service—to cooperate with neighboring landowners to protect natural resources and habitat areas. Without this ability it has been very difficult for parks to keep weed infestations from creeping over their borders from neighboring areas. Landowners with property adjacent to parks can also benefit greatly from the expertise of federal officials in stopping the spread of invasive weeds, and stemming the tide of future reinfestations from park borders.

Following NIWAW, the House passed the bill almost unanimously. The Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee reported favorably on the bill, offering no amendments, and placed it on the

calendar for future consideration. If you live in a state represented by a senator on that committee (including members from Louisiana, Arkansas, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Kentucky, Alabama and Florida), be sure to contact them and ask for their support of the bill.

As activities surrounding the reform of the Endangered Species Act have slowed considerably in recent months, the impact of invasive species on endangered species habitat has not been forgotten. Many attendees at NIWAW highlighted this problem with their senators and representatives. They also asked that programs for eradication of invasive weeds that impact endangered species be enhanced, giving landowners more resources to deal with this threat.

There are many other important bills and agency initiatives discussed at NIWAW and throughout the year. They include memorandums of understanding between multiple federal agencies, urging Congress to write a new bill for aquatic invasive plant species control and many others. The most

important thing we can do to support these initiatives is to be a resource for elected officials who may not have the scientific background to know these impacts on their own. Though it may be difficult to build a relationship with elected officials, giving them the best information on economic impact will help them champion funding for control to protect the ecosystems important to the Southeast region.

CEIPSC members will be well-trained and well-armed to meet with their senators, congressional representatives and federal agency personnel throughout 2007 and beyond. The group continues to seek up-to-date information from everyone interested in this focus on funding. New members are always welcome. We look forward to meeting you and helping you work for change.

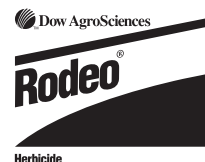
To get the most up-to-date information on the Farm Bill re-authorization process, visit www.usda.gov. Also, see article on page 6.

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