

Invasive Species and the 2007 Farm Bill

K. A. Langeland, University of Florida Agronomy Department and Center for Aquatic and Invasive Plants, J. K. Clark and M. Johnson, Montana State University, Center for Invasive Plant Management

The buzz on Capitol Hill in some circles this past spring was largely about “the Farm Bill.” What the Sam Hill is a Farm Bill? And what does it mean for invasive species management? Read on to find out. Ed.

The Farm Bill

A farm bill is a collection of agriculture-related laws that authorizes programs and sets the overall direction of U.S. agricultural policy for a specified number of years. But farm bills affect much more than farming and farmers (Jones et al. 2001). The farm bill also provides incentives for certain agricultural land management prac-

tices. Fifty-two percent of total U.S. land is in agricultural use, while urban land use and parks and wildlife are just 2.6 and 13.1 percent, respectively (Anonymous 2006). The annual budget for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to implement farm bill policies exceeds \$90 billion, approximately 10 times the budget of the U.S. Department of the Interior (USDI). Thus, the farm bill has more impact on more U.S. land than any other single piece of legislation (Redlin et al. 2007).

American farm policy was first developed in the 1930s to mitigate the catastrophic economic impact of the Great De-

pression (Redlin et al. 2007). Since then, farm bills have increasingly addressed conservation and environmental issues in various ways. The current era of conservation programs emerged with the 1985 farm bill (Food Security Act of 1985, P.L. 99-198), which established the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) (Anonymous 2006). Subsequent farm bills created new conservation programs including the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the Conservation Security Program (CSP), and the Grasslands Reserve Program (GRP), and increased funding of conservation programs to \$4.7 billion in 2005.

The current farm bill (officially the Food Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002) expires Sept. 30, 2007. Congress is in the process of writing a new, five-year farm bill that must be authorized before 2002 farm bill provisions expire. During Farm Bill Forums held nationally by the USDA in 2005-2006 to solicit public input on the new legislation, invasive plant management was often identified as a key issue. Invasive plants may affect farm bill conservation programs in numerous ways. For example, invasive plant species may alter wildlife habitat, reduce production on grasslands and agricultural lands, or may replace less flammable native plants with species that promote wildfire.

Invasive Plant Species and the 2007 Farm Bill Workshop

Farm bill conservation programs are intended to conserve the ecosystem services of U.S. lands and waters with particular attention paid to conservation of soils, wetlands, wildlife habitat, water quantity, and water and air quality. Therefore, it is critical that science-based recommendations regarding invasive plant management be provided to those who are developing the 2007 farm bill. Senate Agriculture Committee staff requested scientific recommendations on how to increase the effectiveness of the farm bill conservation programs in dealing with invasive plants and noxious

Invasive Plants and the 2007 Farm Bill Recommendations¹

Elevate invasive plant management as a critical conservation concern of the 2007 Farm Bill. Invasive plants can change soil properties and reduce soil stability and productivity, alter natural hydrologic regimes, degrade wildlife and migratory bird habitat, degrade wetlands, and alter fire regimes.

Prioritize funding for USDA invasive plant specialists and require comprehensive training of technical service providers who may be consulted regarding invasive plants, site- and ecosystem-appropriate vegetation, and management strategies.

Prioritize prevention and early detection of invasive plants. Invasive plant prevention is more cost-effective and efficient than long-term management.

Make maintenance and restoration of biodiversity an explicit program objective. Diverse plant communities sequester more carbon below-ground and support more diverse lifeforms above-ground. Invasive plants can decrease biodiversity.

Prohibit establishment of invasive plants for biofuel production to avoid spreading invasive plants and tilling highly erodible soils. Determine the invasive potential of species being considered for biofuel production.

Allow haying, mowing, burning, and grazing to manage invasive plants. All actions should be NRCS-approved and strategically timed to allow reproduction of native birds and wildlife and production of native seed.

Expand invasive plant management program eligibility to include non-producers. Invasive plants on non-agricultural lands can threaten the productivity of agricultural lands and the integrity of wildlife habitat.

Provide increased incentives for long-term, multi-stakeholder efforts to prevent or manage invasive plants at multiple spatial scales. Cooperative weed management is likely to engage more people and be more sustainable than single-agency approaches.

Invasive plants should be explicitly excluded from definitions of “appropriate vegetative cover.” Define “appropriate vegetative cover” as species deemed appropriate by NRCS Ecological Site Guides.

Require monitoring of land-health indicators and management effects to provide a basis for management adaptations and program accountability. Long-term data are needed to evaluate program effectiveness and determine future strategies.

¹Based on outcomes of Invasive Plants and the 2007 Farm Bill Workshop, sponsored by the Center for Invasive Plant Management on March 20-21, 2007, at Montana State University-Bozeman

weeds from the Center for Invasive Plant Management (CIPM) at Montana State University. In response, CIPM organized and sponsored a workshop of invited scientists to help inform policy for the 2007 farm bill conservation programs. The workshop was held March 20-21, 2007, at Montana State University-Bozeman. Eight participants, representing seven states and all areas of the U.S., considered the impacts of invasive plants on wildlife, water quality, water quantity, production (agricultural, grazing, and forestry), and wetlands. They assessed the state of the science relevant to conservation programs, considered implications for future management, and developed science-based recommendations.

The CIPM developed two documents from the workshop: a two-page "Invasive Plants and the 2007 Farm Bill Recommendations" (see sidebar) and a draft comprehensive workshop proceedings, "Invasive Plants and the 2007 Farm Bill Workshop Results," annotated with literature citations. These documents are available at http://www.weedcenter.org/farm_bill_07_wkshp.

html. These results were well received when presented to staff of the Senate Agriculture Committee majority and minority leaders and others on April 11, 2007. Results were also presented to the Washington liaison for the Weed Science Society of America, the National Invasive Species Council staff (including coordinators for the USDA and USDI), the Union of Concerned Scientists, and other U.S. Senate staff.

What You Can Do

As of late May, the House had drafted and released language for parts of the new farm bill; the Senate had not yet released its version. To follow progress of the 2007 farm bill legislation, go to <http://agriculture.senate.gov/ag/fb.htm> and <http://agriculture.house.gov/inside/2007FarmBill.html>. The USDA weighs in with its own farm bill suggestions at www.usda.gov (search for "2007 farm bill").

EPPC boards of directors and members are encouraged to monitor language and progress of the 2007 farm bill as various drafts are released throughout the summer.

Contact your legislators to support invasive plant management provisions in the farm bill. Legislators who are on House or Senate agriculture committees will be responsible for crafting the final language of this far-reaching legislation.

Citations

Anonymous. 2006. United States Department of Agriculture-2007 Farm Bill Theme Papers, Conservation and the Environment Executive Summary, June 2006. 5 pp.

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PH 407-718-9154
paul.mason@uap.com

Joe Collins, Government Acct. Coordinator
PH 352-222-0655
joseph.collins@uap.com

Terry Whitecar, Utility Specialist
PH 386-473-3882
terrence.whitecar@uap.com

Dan McMillan, Aquatic / VM Specialist
PH 706-318-3238
daniel.mcmillan@uap.com

Office 863-425-6139, Fax 321-226-0213