

**STATEMENT OF
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NATIONAL FOREST SYSTEM
FOREST SERVICE
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**

**BEFORE THE
UNITED STATES SENATE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON PUBLIC LANDS AND FORESTS
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES**

NOVEMBER 2, 2005

CONCERNING

**S. 1541 Public Land Protection and Conservation
S. 1548 Coffman Cove Administrative Site Conveyance
H.R. 482 Pine Springs Land Exchange**

Mr. Chairman: Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to provide the Department views on S. 1541, the “Public Land Protection and Conservation Act of 2005”; S. 1548, to provide for the conveyance of certain Forest Service land to the city of Coffman Cove, Alaska; and H.R. 482, to provide for a land exchange involving Federal lands in the Lincoln National Forest in the State of New Mexico.

S. 1541 Public Land Protection and Conservation

S. 1541 would establish a new grant program to assess and control the spread of invasive species across the United States, and would authorize financial assistance to respond rapidly to outbreaks of invasive species. The Department concurs with the principles embodied in the legislation, but we believe that the goals of the legislation can be met within existing authorities.

The assistance program that this legislation would establish consists of several elements. Assessment grants, administered by the Secretary of the Interior, would provide funds to a state to identify the occurrence and extent of invasive species within the state and develop management priorities to address them. Control grants would be available to public or private entities and Indian tribes to carry out, in partnership with a Federal agency, control projects for the management or eradication of invasive species on public land or adjacent land. This grant program would be administered by the Secretary of the Interior and includes a requirement to consult with the Secretary of Agriculture regarding projects conducted on National Forest System lands. A third program would authorize assistance to states, local governments, public or private entities, and Indian tribes, to rapidly respond to invasive species outbreaks. A total of \$250 million would be authorized for these three programs for fiscal year 2006.

The Forest Service, among other USDA agencies, has several authorities and grant programs that allow it to address the invasive species threat in a variety of ways. We directly manage approximately 193 million acres across the National Forest System. We also provide technical assistance and administer a nationwide grant program to support cooperative invasive species management for all the Nation's forested lands--urban, state, private, federal, and tribal lands--through our State and Private Forestry organization. The Research and Development organization provides solutions in addressing some of the most significant invasive species. Our responsibilities extend across the United States, from Alaska and Hawaii to the Caribbean and New England.

The Forest Service's long-term vision is to halt the increasing threat of invasive species and begin to reduce impacts and spread of invasive species across the United States. The Forest Service works to achieve these goals by using a number of integrated techniques that address prevention, early detection and rapid response, control and management, and restoration and rehabilitation.

The Department of Agriculture also plays a major role in all aspects of combating invasive species. The Government Accountability Office noted that in fiscal years 1999 and 2000, the Department of Agriculture accounted for 89 percent of all invasive species funding by federal agencies (GAO/RCED-00-219). Agencies within the Departments of Agriculture and the Interior manage the greatest number of acres (193 million acres and 441 million acres respectively) of all federal land management agencies. These two departments, along with the Department of Commerce, co-chair the National Invasive Species Council, which helps to coordinate and ensure complementary, cost-efficient and effective Federal activities regarding invasive species.

We recognize the need for a comprehensive view of invasive species programs, but the development of a crosscut budget should be the responsibility of the National Invasive Species Council; we cannot support changing this to the Office of Management and Budget, as proposed in S. 1541. The Council was created by Executive Order 13112 to coordinate federal invasive species policy and programs and, as mentioned previously, has already developed crosscut budgets in 2005 and 2006. The Council should retain this responsibility.

In addition, we have concerns about the Congressional expectations that might arise from the sizeable authorization levels contained in this legislation which would authorize assessment grants at \$25 million for FY 2006, control grants at \$175 million for FY 2006, and rapid response assistance at \$50 million for FY 2006, and "such sums as are necessary" for FYs 2007-2010. We cannot support these authorization levels, and note that any new funding provided for the program authorized by this legislation would have to compete with existing programs and other Administration priorities.

We commend the Subcommittee for recognizing the ecological problems posed by invasive species. The Subcommittee has recognized that the invasive species challenge to our Nation is enormous, and land managers and communities are using available resources to address it. We agree with the principles embodied in this legislation and will continue to work with our partners to develop a more effective assessment and control strategy for responding to animal and plant invasions. Our goal is to ensure the sustainability of our land and water resources and to promote the restoration of important wildlife habitat impacted by invasive species.

In summary, while we concur with the principles embodied in the legislation, we note that almost all of the actions called for in this legislation can be achieved within existing authorities. We offer to work with the Committee to ensure that existing programs and authorities are effectively targeted to address the Committee's concerns.

S. 1548 Coffman Cove

S. 1548 would convey a portion of a 15-acre Forest Service administrative site situated in the center of a small Alaskan community, Coffman Cove, to the City of Coffman Cove. The bill directs the Secretary of Agriculture, without consideration, to convey fee simple title to twelve acres of the administrative site, to the City.

The Department objects to S. 1548 on the basis of long-standing policy that the government receives market value for such conveyances. However, the Department is sympathetic to the needs of the City of Coffman Cove to control the future development of its future downtown area.

The Forest Service played a central role in the development of the community. In the 1960's, Coffman Cove was a logging camp and work site. Logs were harvested from the

surrounding Tongass National Forest. Eventually, the community developed around the Forest Service administrative site.

In 1986, the State of Alaska received lands surrounding the Coffman Cove administrative site as part of its statehood entitlement. Over time, a decrease in timber sale activity led to a diminished need for the Forest Service administrative site. Within the last six years, all buildings have been removed from the site.

Coffman Cove was incorporated in 1989, and is currently home to about 200 residents. The City is seeking to diversify its economic base in response to changes in the management of the surrounding Tongass National Forest and other economic conditions. With the development of a new ferry terminal adjacent to the Forest Service administrative site, economic opportunities for the City to develop commercial operations and tourism support facilities are improving. However, the location of the Forest Service parcel in the center of town, along the main street bisecting the town and near the ferry terminal, presents a significant obstacle to Coffman Cove's efforts to more fully develop and diversify its economy and design its future downtown. The location of most of the parcel also makes it difficult and inefficient for the Forest Service to adequately manage the site.

Should the Subcommittee choose to move the bill in spite of these concerns, the Department would like to work with the Subcommittee on amendments that would improve accuracy and management efficiency.

H.R. 482 – Pine Springs Land Exchange

H.R. 482 would direct the Secretary of Agriculture to exchange with the Lubbock Christian University all right, title and interest in approximately 80 acres of National Forest System land within the Lincoln National Forest, New Mexico upon receipt of acceptable title to approximately 80 acres of non-federal land. The University has operated a summer camp in the Lincoln National Forest for over 40 years on 40 acres that

it owns. The University seeks to exchange 80 acres that it owns elsewhere in the Forest for 80 acres immediately adjacent to its existing camp. The bill directs that the exchange be equal in value, that the appraisal conform to the uniform appraisal standards for Federal Land Acquisition and that the proponent of the exchange and the United States share the costs of implementing the exchange equally.

The Forest Service and Lubbock Christian University have discussed an administrative land exchange since 2001, roughly comprising the lands described in the bill. While the Department is not opposed to the exchange, we would like to work with the Subcommittee and the bill's sponsor on amendments to insure that land management issues related to floodplains and wetlands are adequately addressed.

This concludes my statement, I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.