

EPW Committee Subcommittees on Water and Wildlife and Subcommittee on  
Oversight “Threats to Native Wildlife Species.”

Wednesday, July 8, 2009

10:00 a.m.

406 Dirksen

Thank you, Chairman Cardin and Chairman Whitehouse and the Members of your subcommittees for holding today’s hearing on the very important topic of threats to our wildlife.

As a Senator from Michigan, a Great Lakes state, I have seen the consequences of allowing aquatic invasive species to enter our waters. About 180 non-native organisms have been indentified already in the Great Lakes. Some of my colleagues may remember that back in the late eighties and nineties, the zebra mussel was released into the Great Lakes through ballast water. At that time, people considered the zebra mussel to be just a problem for the Great Lakes.

Today, *almost 30 states* are fighting to control and prevent them. Zebra Mussels can significantly change the nature of the lake bottom, affecting fish habitat and spawning. They trap nutrients and disrupt the normal flow of these nutrients into deeper waters. The mussels also excrete nutrients creating an environment that may be linked to water quality problems, such as algal fouling on rocky shorelines, off-tastes in drinking water and lethal outbreaks of botulism in wildlife, especially during warm water periods. Mussels eat by filtering algae from the water. This is

the same food source for many native fish which means a less food available to native species. Zebra mussels have caused drastic declines in the native Great Lakes mussels (commonly called clams) not only by competing for food, but also by nesting on top of exposed clamshell so that the native mussel cannot get enough food to survive.

Because invasive species can quickly spread throughout the county, the best effort that we have against invasive species is *prevention*. Maritime commerce is the largest pathway for new species to be introduced into our waters, and I believe that we need to enact legislation that will require ballast water discharge management that will result in ballast water treatment technology onboard ships as soon as possible. I support establishing a strong national ballast water technology standard for all ships. Technology that meets this standard would be approved for a minimum period of time—5, 8, or 10 years.

I also believe it is important to address other pathways of introduction such as intentional introductions. Right now, anyone can order almost any organism on the internet and have it shipped into the U.S., and no one considers whether that organism is invasive and harmful. We need to establish a process to screen incoming organisms. The Great Lakes Collaboration Implementation Act, which I

and Senator Voinovich introduced, establishes a screening process for invasive organisms.

Third, we need to be more aggressive about adding organisms that are invasive and injurious to the Lacey Act list. Listing a species as injurious under the Lacey Act would prevent the intentional introduction of these species by prohibiting the interstate transportation or importation without a permit. One species that I believe should not be imported is the bighead carp, and I will introduce legislation to list the big head carp as injurious under the Lacey Act. Three other species of Asian carp have already been listed. The Asian carp grow very big, reproduce quickly, and are now the most abundant fish in the Mississippi River. It's important to Michigan to prevent these fish from entering the Great Lakes and destroying the native fishery.

Mr. Chairmen and Ranking Members, the impact of invasive species on Michigan's native wildlife is large. I am only able to touch on a few of the invaders that have had such a negative impact to my state, and I know that each of your states is also suffering. So I encourage this committee to support legislation to implement a strong ballast water management program, to create a screening

process for live organisms being imported into the country, and to simplify the process of listing a species as injurious under the Lacey Act.

And now I want to say a few words of introduction about Director Rebecca Humphries, the Director of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, who will testify later on the third panel. Director Humphries has worked her way up through the ranks of the Michigan DNR and has more than 30 years of experience in the natural resources field. She has considerable knowledge on the impacts of invasive species and disease on native wildlife. Over the last few years, she has served as the chair of the “Fish and Wildlife Health Committee” for the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies’ helping to develop a package of information related to state and federal authorities to manage diseases in fish and wildlife so that when a disease outbreak occurs, state agencies are prepared with plans, well-trained staff, and legal authorities. Director Humphries has tackled issues in Michigan such as Viral Hemorrhagic Septicemia (VHS), Chronic Wasting Disease, Emerald Ash Borer, and I believe that she will have some valuable recommendations on how that federal government can work with states to minimize the threats to native wildlife. Thank you, Director Humphries, for coming to Washington to share your insights into these issues.

In closing, I want to thank the members of the two subcommittees for today's hearing as well as the other witnesses.