



Ross Melinchuk
Deputy Executive Director, Natural Resources
Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

Testimony to the Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife, Oceans and Insular Affairs on Efforts to Control and Eradicate the Invasive Weed Giant Salvinia

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Thank you Chairman Fleming, Representative Gohmert and other members of the subcommittee for the opportunity to speak with you today on this very important topic. Caddo Lake has a long history of problems with infestations of invasive aquatic plants. Species such as giant salvinia, water hyacinth and hydrilla have altered aquatic ecosystems and negatively affected boat access, navigation and recreation. Similar issues have occurred in numerous other Texas waterbodies and have been especially prevalent in the eastern portion of the state. To prevent and manage infestations of giant salvinia and other invasive aquatic plants, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department maintains a full-time, 4-man crew of certified pesticide applicators that work statewide. As funding allows, the department also utilizes contractual services to conduct herbicide treatments. Aquatic plant management activities implemented by the department and our contractors are based on an Integrated Pest Management approach that utilizes biological, chemical and mechanical controls, and preventative measures such as boater education and outreach campaigns.

Over the last 10 years, the department's annual statewide budget for management of invasive aquatic plants has ranged from several hundred thousand dollars to nearly \$1.5 million. Funding has been provided by a variety of sources, including Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, river authorities and local partners. For fiscal years 2010 and 2011, the Texas Legislature provided \$750,000 annually for the statewide management of invasive aquatic plants, which was matched with federal grants. State funding has now been eliminated for fiscal years 2012-2013 and the department is reliant on federal grants and partner cost-share to support these activities.

A comprehensive aquatic plant management program would require an estimated \$2 million dollars annually to implement, with at least \$600,000 for giant salvinia.

Giant salvinia was confirmed on the Texas side of Caddo Lake in September 2006. Since 2008, the department has spent, on average, over \$150,000 annually on aquatic plant management on the Texas side of the lake, at an estimated cost of \$60 per acre. After a number of meetings with local, state, and federal officials, including Representative Gohmert, the department and partners developed a bi-state aquatic plant management plan for Caddo Lake in 2007. Funding needed to fully implement that plan was never realized and by September 2009, giant salvinia had expanded its coverage to more than 3,200 acres. Fortunately, due to a combination of cold winters in 2010 and 2011, and aggressive herbicide treatments, giant salvinia has been reduced to less than 300 acres.

Large numbers of giant salvinia weevils were stocked in Caddo Lake earlier this year, and the department is hopeful that this action will prevent the proliferation of giant salvinia during this growing season. Although giant salvinia weevils have proven effective in controlling giant salvinia in many areas of the world, their effectiveness in Texas is somewhat limited by our climate. However, if stocked at high enough rates, they have the potential to enhance our control efforts in Caddo Lake and elsewhere, especially in shallow backwater areas where chemical and mechanical treatments are difficult to conduct. Aquatic plant shredders and other mechanical removal devices have had limited success in east Texas lakes and have not shown to be cost-effective. This is especially true at Caddo Lake, where the abundance of Cypress stumps and other snags make use of these machines almost impossible.

Prevention is definitely the least expensive form of treatment, and public education and outreach efforts such as the Giant Salvinia Awareness Campaign launched in 2010 by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department are important components of the Integrated Pest Management Approach that is being implemented by the department and our partners. Targeted outreach programs can be effective but also can be very expensive. The department spent approximately \$275,000 in 2010 for a one-month media program focused on Caddo Lake, Lake Conroe, Toledo Bend reservoir and Sam Rayburn reservoir. The campaign included radio and television news stories, print ads, online advertising, billboards, boat ramp buoys and gas

station pump toppers in targeted areas. A boater survey conducted following the campaign showed that 51% of boat owners had seen the survey and that awareness had increased. In fact, 96% of boaters surveyed reported that the campaign made them more likely to clean their boat and trailer in the future.

In closing, I want to emphasize our commitment to work with our Louisiana colleagues and other partners to identify and secure a stable source of funding and to coordinate efforts to manage giant salvinia in Caddo Lake and other public water bodies. Thank you for the opportunity to address the Subcommittee on this important topic. I would be happy to answer any questions.