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# Native Plant Conservation Campaign

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Testimony of  
Emily B. Roberson, Ph.D., Director  
Native Plant Conservation Campaign

Regarding

Botany Programs of the Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Forest Service, the Recovery Program of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Prevention and Control of Invasive Non-Native Species Infestations, and the Native Plant Materials Development Program

March 17, 2005

The Native Plant Conservation Campaign (NPCC) is a nationwide network of native plant science and conservation organizations. The NPCC is a project of the Center for Biological Diversity and the California Native Plant Society. Our mission is to promote appreciation and conservation of native plant species and communities through collaboration, education, law, policy, land use and management. Currently the NPCC network includes 33 affiliate native plant societies, botanic gardens, museums, and arboreta, representing more than 60,000 scientists and laypersons nationwide. NPCC members rely on public lands and botanical resources for enjoyment, education, research, and recreation. The NPCC requests that Congress augment the budget of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) by \$21,126,613 and that of the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) by 15,516,977 to adequately staff botany programs within these agencies. We further request a minimum of \$100 million for the FWS Recovery Program budget to begin to address the backlog in recovery plan implementation, and \$14.4 million for invasive non-native plant inventory and control. Finally we request \$10 million for the BLM and USFS Native Plant Materials Development Program.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **A. Land Management Agency Staffing**

America's native plants and public lands are central to the nation's quality of life and economic well being. Botanists are among the most important resource managers on public lands, but land management agencies are severely understaffed in botany. Nationwide, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) employs approximately 61 botanists to manage vegetation on its 264 million acres (1 botanist/4.3 million ac.). The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) employs approximately 200 botanists across 191 million acres of National Forests (1 botanist/1.1 million ac.). This is a serious problem for a number of reasons.

First, plants are the foundations of ecosystems. Health of native vegetation controls the quality and quantity of goods, services and enjoyment that Americans derive from our public lands. Second, butterflies, bears, and all native wildlife that the public enjoys require healthy native plant communities for survival. Third, species conservation, recreation, commodity production and all other programs require input and review from qualified botanists to avoid resource damage, controversy and litigation. National Forests, for example, provide habitat for nearly 2,000 "sensitive" plants, any of which could become eligible for federal listing if mismanaged. Finally, the President's priorities for public lands

*Promoting appreciation and conservation of native plant species and communities through collaboration, education, law, policy, land use and management*

include increased emphasis on fire and invasive species management to prevent further ecological degradation. These priorities require high quality vegetation management, so botanists are integral to their successful implementation. Staffing levels are inadequate to meet agencies' duties to taxpayers or the needs of our resources.

## **B. Recovery**

Recovery of imperiled species and their removal from the federal endangered species list is the primary goal of the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Unfortunately, the President's 2006 budget request *reduces recovery funding by 10%*. Further, plant recovery programs are severely underfunded and understaffed. Sixty percent of federal endangered species are plants. However, according to the FWS in FY 2000, only 4.5% of federal recovery funding went to listed plants. Thus, most plant recovery plans are not adequately implemented; many are not implemented at all. The FWS has a recovery ranking system based on likelihood of recovery and degree of threat to each listed species and a priority system for recovery tasks. We suggest that this system be used as the basis for more equitable recovery budgeting.

## **C. Invasive Non-Native Species**

Invasive non-native species cause up to \$123 billion in economic losses in the United States each year. Scientists implicate non-native species in the decline of 49% of federally listed species (57% of plants). According to the BLM, invasive non-native plants (weeds) already dominate at least 17 million acres of federal lands. These infestations reduce the value of our public lands for recreation, wildlife, and livestock. They also often cause other problems such as reduced water supply and increased fire danger. Agencies must be adequately funded to prevent and control invasive non-native species infestations. The President's budget calls for a *reduction* of funding for the Forest Service invasive species program. This is unacceptable as weeds are devastating ecosystems and economies throughout the U.S.

## **D. Native Plant Materials Development Program – BLM Wildland Fire Management Budget**

The purpose of this program is to develop seed of local native plants to be used for restoration and revegetation projects on federal lands. The use of native plant materials ensures sustainable, successful revegetation and restoration of public lands, helps maintain local biological diversity, and maintains a sustainable flow of goods and services from public lands. Funding for this program has been dropping. It should be fully funded. This program is funded through the BLM wildland fire management budget.

## **REQUEST**

### **A. Land Management Agency Staffing**

The following augmentations are the minimum necessary to begin to move the agencies towards adequate botany staffing:

- Each USFS Ranger District should be staffed with at least one full time series 430 botanist.
- There are 156 BLM field offices. Their areas of responsibility vary from several thousand to several million acres. We propose that BLM nationwide employ one series 430 botanist for each 500,000 acres under management. Botanists should be distributed based on local workloads. At minimum each BLM field office should be staffed with one full time botanist.

Based on a GS-11 Step 1 base salary with no locality adjustment (\$45,239/yr), these staff levels would require the following budget augmentations:

Agency	Current FTEs	FTE Goal	Needed	Additional Cost (vs. current budget)
USFS	200	543 (1 FTE per Ranger District)	343	\$15,516,977.00
BLM	61	528 (1 FTE per 0.5 million acres)	467	\$21,126,613.00
<b>TOTAL</b>				<b>\$36,643,590.00</b>

### B. Recovery

We request that Congress fully fund FWS recovery plans for FY 2006 for plants and animals with High Recovery Potential and a High or Moderate degree of Threat, according to the FWS priority ranking system. For lower ranked species, we request that Priority 1 recovery actions identified in recovery plans be funded for FY 2006. Priority 1 actions are defined by FWS as *actions needed to prevent extinction*.

We do not have the FWS recovery budget requests for the species that fall into these categories. However, recent scientific studies based on the FWS priority system and species status recommended an augmentation of \$300 million above current annual recovery spending. This augmentation would certainly improve recovery success under the ESA. Given current budget constraints, we request a recovery budget of at least **\$100 million** for the FY 06 FWS recovery program.

### C. Invasive non-native species

The BLM received \$7.7 million in FY 04 for control and inventory of invasive non-native plants nationwide. The agency estimated it required approximately \$16 million to adequately meet needs for FY 05. That was a budget augmentation of **\$8.3 million**. We do not have FY 06 figures.

Region 5 of the USFS has estimated that an additional \$700,000/yr is needed to meet regional weed control needs for FY 06. Based on the assumption that all 10 USFS regions need at least that amount, we request a budget augmentation of **\$7 million** for USFS non-native plant inventory and control programs service-wide. Total FY 06 request for **BLM + Forest Service = \$15.4 million** over FY 05 budget

### D. Native Plant Materials Development

This crucial program should be funded at a minimum of **\$10 million**.

We hope that you will take these proposals and issues into account as you formulate budgets for FY 2006 and beyond. Thank you for the opportunity to present this request.

Sincerely,



Emily B. Roberson, Ph.D.  
Director

**NATIVE PLANT CONSERVATION CAMPAIGN  
Affiliate and Cooperating Organizations**

<b>NPCC Affiliates</b>	<b>NPCC Cooperators</b>
Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum	Botresearch USA
Arizona Native Plant Society	CalFlora Database
Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI)	California Trout
California Native Plant Society	Center for Native Ecosystems
California Oak Foundation	Defenders of Wildlife
Center for Biological Diversity	Endangered Species Coalition
Colorado Native Plant Society	Forest Service Employees for Environmental Ethics
Florida Native Plant Society	Pacific Rivers Council
Grand Prairie Friends of Illinois	PlantaEuropa
Herb Society of America	PlantLife, UK
Idaho Native Plant Society	Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility
Iowa Native Plant Society	T&E Inc.
Kauai Native Plant Society	Xerces Society
Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center	
Maryland Native Plant Society	
Minnesota Native Plant Society	
Missouri Native Plant Society	
Montana Native Plant Society	
Native Plant Society of New Mexico	
Native Plant Society of Northeastern Ohio	
Native Plant Society of Oregon	
New England Wild Flower Society (NH, CT, RI, MA, ME, VT)	
New Mexico Rare Plant Technical Council	
North Carolina Botanical Garden	
North Carolina Wild Flower Preservation Society	
Oklahoma Native Plant Society	
South Carolina Native Plant Society	
Ticonderoga Arboretum and Botanical Gardens, VA	
Utah Native Plant Society	
Virginia Native Plant Society	
Washington Native Plant Society	
West Virginia Native Plant Society	
Wyoming Native Plant Society	