

**Invasive Species Advisory Council Meeting Highlights  
May 17-18, Washington D.C.  
Michael Buck/Hawaii**

While I was not able to attend the meeting, here is a report of some of the highlights of the latest meeting of the Advisory Committee and Invasive Species Council on May 17 - 18, 2000 in Washington. The Invasive Species Advisory Committee (ISAC) had not met since January, while work has proceeded in 6 much larger working groups. The six working groups are: Communication, Education, and Outreach; International Cooperation; Management; Policy and Regulation; Research and Information; and Risk Analysis and Prevention. Summaries of the working groups report presentations with ISAC reaction are presented below. I have all the formal reports as well as agency budget presentations if you like - just ask.

**TIMELINE:** The Working Groups, Council staff, and some writers hired for the purpose will produce a draft Management Plan by the end of June. This report will be made available for public comment through a number of LISTENING SESSIONS during the period 10 - 18 July; the listening sessions are tentatively to be held in California, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, New York. State governments will also be encouraged to comment at this time (several representatives of state agencies are on the Advisory Committee).

Following the listening sessions, the ISAC will reconvene and devote two full days to discussing the draft, the comments received, etc. One goal will be to explore areas of diverging views and see if the ISAC can develop consensus on some of them. The ISAC may also discuss what to say in the Management Plan about those areas on which they could not reach consensus. The government agencies in the Invasive Species Council will also review the draft.

Later in August, a revised draft Management Plan will be published with full Federal Register announcements, etc. and everyone will have a period to comment on it (either 60 or 90 days). Then, in October/November, the Advisory Committee will again review the comments and recommend changes. Again, the government agencies in the Invasive Species Council will review the draft. The Council (government) has the final word on the report.

The final version of the initial Management Plan is to be released before the end of 2000. The Management Plan is then to be revised every two years to reflect progress, new information, etc.

**MEETING HIGHLIGHTS:** Governor Kempthorne of Idaho (a member of the ISAC) addressed the group and stressed the need to move ahead. The ISAC adopted a provisional set of Guiding Principles which will guide its work on developing the Management Plan. These principles have the following headings: 1) take action now; 2) be cautious [about relocating species to new areas] and comprehensive; 3) work smart, be adaptive; 4) find balance; 5) pull together; 6) be inclusive while meeting specific needs. The full set of "guiding principles" will be available in the draft Management Plan to be sent out to the "listening sessions" in July.

On the second day of the meeting, the General Accounting Office explained that it has been asked by Congress to do two reports on the invasive species program. The first will look at how effectively federal and state agencies are addressing the problem and includes an effort to identify how much money is currently being spent. The GAO will also ask the states how well the federal agencies coordinate with them. The states included in the review are New York, Maryland, Florida, Michigan, Idaho, California, and Hawai`i -

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states which have active programs and represent a geographic range. Over the longer term, the GAO will do a more substantive review of the federal programs, with an emphasis on exclusion/prevention.

The federal agencies then presented reports on progress and their budgets. Some of the ISAC members asked for a more frank discussion of problems, including funding needs. One ISAC member specifically asked about the failure to provide additional funds for Forest Service research on ways to minimize damage by exotic "pests". The ISAC discussed how they can most productively push the agencies and Office of Management and Budget to provide additional funding for invasive species programs. The ISAC also raised the continuing problem of improving various agencies' cooperation.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the USDA announced funding for two weed projects: \$265,000 to combat recently discovered infestations of giant salvinia, an aquatic weed, in Texas and other states of the Southeast; and \$100,000 to start a multi-partner weed eradication program in the Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness on the Idaho-Oregon border.

The Invasive Species Council will soon have on line a new web page: [invasivespecies.gov](http://invasivespecies.gov). It is intended to provide both information on invasive species and the Council's activities; and links to other sites with bio-invasion information. Several members of the public observed parts or even all of the 2-day meeting and a few made comments mostly offers to assist on various aspects.

**SUMMARY OF CONTENTS OF WORKING GROUP REPORTS**

Each Working Group prepared a draft report for the overall ISAC in which it laid out its vision of what needs to be done and, in some cases, how to get it done. During its meeting, the Committee reacted to these reports and instructed the Working Groups on products and directions needed in the immediate future -- for preparation of the draft to be sent to the listening sessions in July, etc.

**Communication Working Group:** Everyone agreed that gaining public support for a strong invasive species program will depend on an effective communication program. This committee has made considerable progress in elaborating the contents and mechanisms of a comprehensive plan and the need to target appropriate messages to specific audiences, integrate the many existing educational efforts, etc. There will be a need for long-term funding and infrastructure to carry out an effective program. The committee believes that the report must state that biological invasion is a mechanism of global ecological change and that solutions require changing human behavior.

Some ISAC members asked the working group to provide more guidance on what the message should be and help in developing the communication strategy for the Management Plan itself. Several suggested that we learn from the Australian and New Zealand efforts, which are more advanced - what worked, what didn't. Some suggested emphasizing "heritage" as a way to build support and interest.

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**International Working Group :** This committee has recommended a number of specific actions intended to raise awareness among both U.S. foreign policy leaders and leaders of foreign governments; to push ahead with cooperative efforts with governments that are already interested (Australia, New Zealand, Norway, South Africa) and in international organizations that already have the issue on their agendas (Convention on Biological Diversity). Much of the proposed work will be done in conjunction with the ongoing Global Invasive Species Programme which is a collaborative effort of the UN Scientific Committee on Problems of the Environment (SCOPE), IUCN Invasive Species Specialist Group, and others. In addition, there are several efforts under way to improve collection and sharing of information about invasive species. Government participants have compiled a lengthy list of international agreements that relate to invasive species (sometimes the relationship is rather distant). Additional areas for which work is proposed, but fewer concrete "projects" outlined, include examining how to ensure that foreign assistance programs do not promote invasive species, looking again at international trade agreements to see whether they allow aggressive programs to prevent transport of potentially invasive species, and helping exporting countries to meet tighter requirements intended to halt such transport. There is also interest in exploring what kinds of international agreements expressly addressing invasive species might be appropriate. The Convention on Biological Diversity will devote much of its 6<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties (in 2002 or 2003) to the invasive species issue and might explore developing a protocol.

Several members of the Advisory Committee encouraged greater efforts to involve international professional societies and other NGOs in this work. One urged the working group to try to target our "outreach" efforts to trading partners who are either major "suppliers" of potentially invasive species in the U.S. or recipients of potentially invasive species from us.

**Management Working Group:** The management working group stated that efforts to control or manage invasions needs to be in the context of overall management goals for the area or ecosystem; restoration goals and methods must "inform" the choice of management tools. The working group recognized all management tools as valuable in that context with choices among them to be guided by that premise. The working group called for faster risk analysis processes for halting introduction and spread of species, but it did not recommend either a "clean" or "dirty" list approach. The group called for beefing up capabilities for detection and rapid response. It also called for finding ways to overcome jurisdictional disputes and conflicting mandates so that action can proceed. There was discussion but no agreement on how to speed up compliance with NEPA and other statutes that require analysis, approval, etc.).

In the discussion, one member of the ISAC welcomed the working group's list of unresolved issues and asked the group to give more guidance on acting while information is still incomplete. At what point is there "enough" information? Some felt the group did not give adequate attention to the states' efforts. Another suggested that the recommendation for using native plants in restoration also discuss the ways to overcome the barriers that reduce availability of native plants.

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An ISAC member pointed out the dearth of experts on animal diseases and parasites in the various working groups. Another gap is forest "pests". The ISAC agreed to encourage a broader range of experts to participate in developing the plan.

**Risk Assessment Working Group:** The group focused more on prevention strategy, and outlined information needs about pathways, organisms, and ecosystems. Several ISAC members asked for more "action" guidance. For example, a discussion of how to use risk assessment as an operational tool in the face of the many "unknowns" -- and to conduct risk analysis most efficiently. Several noted that some introduction pathways are well recognized -- how can we move rapidly to "close" those? What are the priority issue areas that need research? The National Research Council is finalizing a study of risk assessment for plant pests, which should be out for review in August. Participants may be able to insert elements of this study into current work on the initial Management Plan.

**Policy and Regulation Working Group:** The Policy group got a late start; it is now at an early stage of trying to develop consensus around an "ideal" program to which it would then compare the existing maze of laws and "needs" identified by agency staffs, by previous reports such as that by the Office of Technology Assessment, and by the working groups. A contractor is also working on developing "NEPA Guidance" for both aspects of the invasive species issue, examining the ways that proposed action might influence bio-invasion, and how to make the NEPA analysis of proposed invasive species actions more efficient.

The ISAC said that the draft report due in weeks needs to include at least a "first cut" analysis of gaps in legislative authority. The working group will have to focus on that complex task now; it will probably rely largely on "gaps" identified by agency staffs, and may not be able to include even many of the "gaps" identified or implied in the other groups' drafts. The more substantive review of the "big picture" will have to wait. The group wants the draft Management Plan to clearly state that the "legislative gap" information is quite preliminary because many believe that a more comprehensive review will result in much broader policy recommendations perhaps creating new agencies, consolidating authorities, etc. Further, several members of the working group and the ISAC expressed the importance of reviewing even the "narrow" list of legislative gaps before it appears in the draft Management Plan. It was agreed that an analysis of "implementation gaps" situations in which agencies have authority, but have not used it will also have to wait until later.

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