

# CALIFORNIA INVASIVE WEEDS AWARENESS COALITION

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

### Protecting California from Invasive Weeds

Coalition sponsors legislation to shield environment, agriculture

SACRAMENTO, CA, March 7, 2006 – California's natural environment and agricultural bounty share an impressive degree of diversity. Preserving these unique resources is the goal of the California Invasive Weed Awareness Coalition (CALIWAC), a consortium of private groups joined to improve the state's response to noxious and invasive weeds. The group has sponsored AB 2479 to fund the state's network of local Weed Management Areas. This legislation would protect hundreds of thousands of acres of California's agricultural and natural habitat from invasive weeds that threaten the state's productivity and natural diversity.

California's farms and parks, its rural landscapes and riverbeds, even its mountain ranges and deserts are slowly being damaged by invaders with names like spotted knapweed, giant arundo and scarlet wisteria. Some plants, such as iceplant, pampas grass, and Himalayan blackberry, have become so pervasive that most Californians assume they've always been here. What we don't see, though, is the native plants that have been forced from their natural habitat by these invasive, non-native weeds. Each displacement of native plant communities, in turn, can push out wildlife and further disrupt a region's natural cycles. They can have extensive effects on society as well, by increasing wildfire danger, reducing flood control capacity, consuming valuable water resources, degrading forage for wildlife and livestock, and damaging recreational opportunities.

"Californians are slowly gaining an awareness of the damage these weeds can do." Said Dr. Elizabeth Brusati, ecologist with the nonprofit California Invasive Plant Council, one of the coalition's partner groups. "Many of them are attractive plants, but when you learn just how much trouble they cause, they don't look so good. They clog water pumps, harm livestock and wildlife, intensify fires, close trails, and threaten endangered species habitat."

California's productive agriculture and natural beauty are unmatched in the world. Though pathogens and insect pests grab most of the headlines, invasive plants are quietly, inexorably damaging the landscape. Andrea Fox of the California Farm Bureau Federation says that's why the newly introduced legislation is so vital. "AB 2479 gives local weed management groups a fighting chance to protect many of our state's key resources from invasive weeds. On-the-ground solutions to invasive weeds need collaborative planning at the local level, and this program supports these important efforts."

The bill is a key part of the state's new action plan on weeds. Released at this week's Invasive Weeds Awareness Day in Sacramento, the California Noxious and Invasive Weed Action Plan is a 50-page blueprint for addressing urgent needs such as detecting new infestations, analyzing control options, coordinating response efforts among multiple agencies and organizations, and conducting research to advance the effectiveness of weed control.

CALIWAC is a consortium of private sector groups working to advance weed control efforts in California. Participant organizations include the California Native Plant Society, California Invasive Plant Council, Regional Council of Rural Counties, California Farm Bureau Federation, California Forest Pest Council, and California Cattlemen's Association.

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