

# **Update: Federal Interagency Committee for the Management of Noxious and Exotic Weeds**

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A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) establishing the Federal Interagency Committee for the Management of Noxious and Exotic Weeds (FICMNEW) was signed by 17 land-holding federal agencies in 1994. The purpose of the MOU is:

- 1) to facilitate cooperation and provide an integrated ecological approach to the management of noxious and exotic weeds on federal lands, and
- 2) to provide technical assistance for application to private lands.

The federal agencies propose to work together, within the scope of their respective authorities, toward a common goal of achieving sustainable, healthy ecosystems that meet the needs of society. This committee will coordinate a federal government approach including the identification of agency needs and will make recommendations to Departmental leadership on research, technology transfer, and management actions. The agencies in FICMNEW include:

- Department of the Interior
  - Bureau of Land Management
  - Bureau of Reclamation
  - U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
  - National Park Service
  - National Biological Service
  - Bureau of Indian Affairs
- Department of Agriculture
  - Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service
  - Agriculture Research Service
  - Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service
  - Natural Resources Conservation Service
  - Forest Service
  - Agricultural Extension Service
  - Agricultural Marketing Service
  - Cooperative State Research Service
- Department of Defense
- Department of Transportation
- Department of Energy.

There are two Co-Chairs of FICMNEW – Sean Furniss from the Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of Interior and Jim Stewart from the Forest Service, Department of Agriculture.

FICMNEW is required or empowered to do the following:

- share scientific and technical expertise
- encourage collaboration and interchange
- cooperate in technical workshops, publications, demonstration present yearly progress reports
- cooperate with other public and private agencies
- transfer services and funds between or among agencies

FICMNEW as a body has no delegated authority to set policy for its signatory agencies, nor does it have an operating budget. Currently, its activities are limited to cooperating through the sharing of information. For example, as a first step toward scientific collaboration, FICMNEW is building a database of all weed scientists from the signatory agencies. The database is being coordinated by the Department of Defense; steps are being taken so that the database is Internet-accessible.

FICMNEW is constrained in its activities by the bureaucratic process federal agencies must go through to pool or share funds. Consequently, FICMNEW is studying alternative models to fund-sharing that could be used to make FICMNEW's goals more attainable. For example, the Forest Pest Management Program and the Federal Fire Program have both been successful in fostering cooperation among agencies and in obtaining and distributing funds for managing natural resource problems across several agencies. Legislation from Congress is needed in order to institute such a program for weed research and control efforts.

In the meantime, FICMNEW members are working together to get the word out that this organization exists. Jim Stewart of the U.S. Forest Service and FICMNEW co-chair attended a conference in Denver last September, which brought Federal, state, private, academic, and not-for-profit stakeholders together to discuss the problem of exotic weeds in the western United States. At a roundtable discussion, participants began to draft a national strategy to combat this problem through mutual cooperation of stakeholders. The group suggested five components to a national strategy:

- 1) education and prevention;
- 2) inventory and monitoring;
- 3) integrated weed management control;
- 4) cooperative weed management projects; and
- 5) research needs.

Governor Romer offered Colorado as a pilot project to demonstrate cooperative approaches to preventing and controlling invasive weeds. Deputy Secretary of the Interior John Garamendi pledged to seek to involve all Federal agencies through FICMNEW to work together with state and local governments and private partners to coordinate and prioritize a nationwide effort to fight exotic weeds.

Following the Denver meeting, B.J. Thornberry, Deputy Chief of Staff for the Department of the Interior (DOI) attended a FICMNEW meeting to express DOI's commitment to a national initiative for weed control and prevention.

An eastern and tropical weed conference was held November 30 and December 1 in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. This conference paralleled the Denver meeting, with a focus on eastern and tropical regions of the United States; several FICMNEW members attended, including co-chair Sean Furniss. Deputy Secretary Richard Rominger of the U.S. Department of Agriculture delivered the keynote address and pledged that USDA would take a leadership role in a national effort to combat exotic invasive plants. Governor Chiles, through the Lieutenant Governor MacKay, offered Florida as a pilot project for cooperative weed prevention and control. At the roundtable discussion, participants added five components to the draft national strategy begun in Denver:

- 1) a Florida pilot project,
- 2) funding and legislation,
- 3) partnerships,
- 4) restoration, and
- 5) the role of FICMNEW.

Individuals volunteered to serve on committees to develop position papers with goals and objectives for each of these subject areas and for the subject areas identified in Denver.

In March in Albuquerque, at a joint meeting of the Western Society of Weed Scientists and the Western Weed Coordinating Committee, results from the Denver meeting and the Ft. Lauderdale meeting will be combined and the framework for a national strategy will be fleshed out. The Society for Range Management is organizing a group of stakeholders (professional societies, land users, not-for-profits, industry, etc.) who will attend the Albuquerque meeting to determine the need for a national coordinating committee for weed-related activities.

In our opinion, what is needed from FICMNEW is coordination, funding and execution of a joint weed control policy. It is imperative to begin a serious national program for control of invasive exotic weeds while managing ecosystems. We support FICMNEW and is willing to cooperate with other entities in giving that support. We desire to supply technical information on the control and management of weeds, and to serve as an advisor to FICMNEW.

FICMNEW has given us the promise of action, now we want to hold them to that promise and find the solution to the problems of managing invasive, exotic weeds in an efficacious and cost-effective manner. Through partnerships, cooperation and collaboration we can stem the raging storm of exotic weeds.

A FICMNEW home page on the World Wide Web is maintained by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; its Internet address is:

<http://bluegoose.arw.r9.fws.gov/FICMNEWFiles/FICMNEWHomePage.html>