

October 4, 2012

Mr. Boris Bershteyn, Acting Administrator  
Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs  
Office of Management and Budget  
725 17<sup>th</sup> Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20503

Dear Mr. Bershteyn,

The undersigned organizations are writing to express our serious concerns with the EPA's proposed rule "Regulation of Fuels and Fuel Additives: Identification of Additional Qualifying Renewable Fuel Pathways Under the Renewable Fuel Standard Program." We are particularly concerned about the approval of *Arundo donax* (giant reed) as a qualified advanced biofuel feedstock.

*Arundo donax* is a non-native species that is a well-known and well-documented invader of natural areas. At least five published weed risk assessments have determined that *Arundo donax* is a likely invasive species.<sup>1</sup> USDA, in their June 2012 weed risk assessment, concluded with very low uncertainty that *Arundo donax* is a high risk species, noting that it is a "highly invasive grass" and a "serious environmental weed" that can alter the hydrology, nutrient cycling, and fire regimes in areas where it becomes established.<sup>2</sup> *Arundo donax* displaces native vegetation and negatively impacts certain threatened and endangered species such as the Least Bell's Vireo. In the United States, *Arundo donax* is listed as a noxious weed in Texas<sup>3</sup> California,<sup>4</sup> Colorado<sup>5</sup>, and Nevada.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, it has been noted as either invasive or a serious risk in New Mexico, Alabama, and South Carolina.<sup>7</sup> Once *Arundo donax* has invaded an area, control is difficult and costly. In California, costs range between \$5,000 and \$17,000 per acre to eradicate the weed. Other estimates put that cost as high as \$25,000 per acre.<sup>8</sup>

Given the high risk of invasion, providing incentives under the Renewable Fuel Standard for the cultivation of *Arundo donax* has the potential for serious unintended ecological and economic impacts. Under Executive Order 13112, EPA should not provide production incentives for high risk feedstocks such as *Arundo donax* without determining that the benefits "clearly outweigh" the costs. Given the difficulty of eradicating *Arundo donax* and the extent of potential environmental damages, it is highly unlikely that the benefits would clearly outweigh the costs.

Therefore, the undersigned organizations believe that EPA should not approve *Arundo donax* as an approved advanced biofuel feedstock under the Renewable Fuel Standard. If OMB moves forward with releasing the rule, we request to see a complete assessment of the costs and benefits, as outlined in Executive Order 13112. Additionally, if EPA approves *Arundo donax* and similarly high risk feedstocks, we believe that the rule must include – at the very minimum—guidelines on stringent best management practices to reduce the risk of escape. These guidelines should be written with the guidance of the National Invasive Species Council and relevant federal agencies.

Thank you for considering these comments.

Sincerely,

Alabama Invasive Plant Council  
Albemarle Conservation & Wildlife Chapter (NC)  
Alger Conservation District (MI)  
Alliance for the Great Lakes  
Altamaha Riverkeeper (GA)  
American Naturalist Network  
Appalachian Ohio Weed Control Partnership  
Aquatic Plant Management Society  
Association of State Wetland Managers  
Blunn Creek Partnership (TX)  
Cahaba Riverkeeper (AL)  
California Invasive Plant Council  
California Native Plant Society  
Chattahoochee Riverkeeper (GA)  
Clean Air Task Force  
Clean Wisconsin  
Conservation Voters of South Carolina  
Cowlitz County Noxious Weed Control Board (WA)  
Ecological Society of America  
Environment and Energy Study Institute  
Environmental Defense Fund  
Environmental Working Group  
Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council  
Florida Wildlife Federation  
Friends of Forest Preserves (IL)  
Friends of the Earth  
Friends of the Parks  
Gaston County Piedmont Area Wildlife Stewards (PAWS) - NC  
Georgia Conservancy  
Georgia Exotic Pest Plant Council (GA-EPPC)  
Georgia River Network  
Georgia Wildlife Federation  
Grays Harbor County Noxious Weed Board (WA)  
Great Lakes United  
Greater Raleigh Outdoors and Wildlife (GROW) - NC  
Habitat and Wildlife Keepers (HAWK) - NC  
Invasive Plant Atlas of New England  
Kansas Wildlife Federation  
Kentucky Exotic Pest Plant Council  
King County Noxious Weed Control Board (WA)  
Kornegay Design, LLC  
Lake James Area Wildlife and Nature Society (NC)  
Lake Norman Wildlife Conservationists (NC)

Lower Columbia Cooperative Weed Management Area  
Lower Mississippi Riverkeeper  
Mid Atlantic Invasive Plant Council  
Midshore Riverkeeper Conservancy (MD)  
Midwest Invasive Plant Network  
Milwaukee Riverkeeper  
Missouri Prairie Foundation  
Mountain Island Lake Wildlife (NC)  
Mountain Wild! (NC)  
National Environmental Coalition on Invasive Species  
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition  
National Wildlife Federation  
Native Plant Society of Oregon  
Natural Resources Defense Council  
NC Camo Coalition  
North Carolina Conservation Network  
North Carolina Wildlife Federation  
North Central Weed Science Society  
North Cook County Soil & Water Conservation District (IL)  
Northeast Illinois Invasive Plant Partnership  
Northeastern Weed Science Society  
Northwest Weed Management Partnership  
NY/NJ Baykeeper  
Oklahoma Invasive Plant Council  
Pacific Northwest Invasive Plant Council  
Pamlico-Tar River Foundation (NC)  
Pollinator Partnership  
Protecting, Advocating, and Conserving Together (PACT) in the High Country (NC)  
Purple Martin Conservation Association  
Quinalt/Queets Cooperative Weed Management Area (WA)  
River Network  
Shaw Nature Reserve (MO)  
Sierra Club  
South Carolina Coastal Conservation League  
South Carolina Wildlife Federation  
South Dakota Wildlife Federation  
South Texas Chapter of the Native Plant Society of Texas  
Southern Alliance for Clean Energy  
Southern Weed Science Society  
Southwest Washington Cooperative Weed Management Area  
Spokane Riverkeeper  
St. Croix River Association (WI)  
Tennessee Riverkeeper  
Texas A&M Society for Ecological Restoration Student Guild  
The Invasive Plants Association of Wisconsin  
The Mid-Coast Invaders (TX)

Union of Concerned Scientists  
Waterkeepers Carolina  
Weed Science Society of America  
Western Society of Weed Science  
Wisconsin Wetlands Association  
Wisconsin Wildlife Federation  
Yadkin Riverkeeper (NC)

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<sup>1</sup> Gordon, D.R., K.J. Tancig, D.A. Onderdonk, and C.A. Gantz. 2011. Assessing the invasive potential of biofuel species proposed for Florida and the United States using the Australian Weed Risk Assessment. *Biomass and Bioenergy* 35: 74-79; Buddenhagen, C.E., C. Chimera, and P. Clifford. 2009. Assessing biofuel crop invasiveness: A case study. *PLoS ONE* 4 : e5261; Gassó N, Basnou C & Vilà M (2010). Predicting plant invaders in the Mediterranean through a weed risk assessment system. *Biol. Invasions* 12:463-476; Barney JN & Ditomaso JM (2008). Nonnative species and bioenergy: are we cultivating the next invader? *BioScience* 58: 64-70; USDA APHIS. 2012. Weed risk assessment for *Arundo donax* L. (Poaceae) – Giant reed. Version 1.

<sup>2</sup> USDA APHIS. 2012

<sup>3</sup> USDA NRCS. “Invasive and Noxious Weeds.” <http://plants.usda.gov/java/noxious?rptType=State&statefips=48> (accessed March 8, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> California Department of Food and Agriculture. “Encyloweedia: Data Sheets.” <http://www.cdfa.ca.gov/plant/ipc/weedinfo/winfolist-pestrating.htm> (accessed March 8, 2012).

<sup>5</sup> Colorado Department of Agriculture. “Noxious Weed Management Program.” <http://www.colorado.gov/cs/Satellite/Agriculture-Main/CDAG/1174084048733> (accessed March 8, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> Nevada Department of Agriculture. “Noxious Weed List.” [http://agri.nv.gov/nwac/PLANT\\_No WeedList.htm](http://agri.nv.gov/nwac/PLANT_No WeedList.htm) (Last modified February 2, 2012).

<sup>7</sup> Florida Native Plant Society. “Florida Native Plant Society Policy Statement on *Arundo donax*.” [http://www.fnps.org/committees/policy/pdfs/policyarundo\\_policy\\_statement1.pdf](http://www.fnps.org/committees/policy/pdfs/policyarundo_policy_statement1.pdf) (Last updated November 6, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> Giessow, J., J. Casanova, R. Leclerc, G. Fleming, and J. Giessow. 2011. *Arundo donax* (Giant Reed): Distribution and Impact Report. *California Invasive Plant Council*.