

WASHINGTON UPDATE

By Lee Van Wychen

December 2007

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WSSA PUBLIC AWARENESS COMMITTEE IS SPREADING THE WORD, NOT THE WEEDS

In July 2006, the WSSA Board of Directors identified a series of strategic goals to make the Society a more recognized force in the national debate over ecosystems management and sustainable practices in plant management and provide greater value to members. Subsequently, the Board created the Public Awareness Steering Committee whose mission was to raise the public awareness of weeds and invasive plants. Initial Steering Committee members include Janis McFarland as chair, Mike Chandler, Carol Mallory-Smith, John Jachetta, Tony White and myself. Over the past year, Carol Somody and Joyce Lancaster have also become active members. With 300+ hours of volunteer effort in 2007, we have developed a detailed public awareness strategy, prioritized our main outreach messages, and issued five press releases so far. The press releases (www.wssa.net/WSSA/PressRoom/) have covered a number of opportune invasive weed issues such as their influence on wildfires and their potential negative impacts if used as biofuels. The press releases have been distributed via PR Newswire (www.prnewswire.com) as well as invasive plant-related list serves and have been featured on other websites and accessed by various types of media. The WSSA's relationship with the media is growing as a recent press release was accessed 942 times on the PR Newswire site. Reporters from major newspapers are starting to call us for expert opinion and commentary and more importantly, helping us expand our credibility and awareness to the public.

The Public Awareness Steering Committee is also working with the Website Committee to update and expand the WSSA Website, which now includes a section for press releases and detailed information and links concerning invasive plants.

IRREFUTABLE EVIDENCE PRESENTED AT EPA SHOWING ATRAZINE WILL NOT FEMINIZE KERMIT THE FROG

The Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA) Scientific Advisory Panel (SAP) conducted a public peer review meeting on October 9-12 at EPA to review the data

from recently concluded independent studies on the “Response of Larval *Xenopus laevis* (African clawed frogs) to Atrazine Exposure: Assessment of Metamorphosis and Gonadal Morphology”. The FIFRA SAP (<http://www.epa.gov/scipoly/sap/pubs/about.htm>) is a body of independent scientific experts that provide advice and recommendations to the EPA on important pesticide-related issues. After this meeting, EPA concluded that **atrazine does not adversely affect amphibian** gonadal development based on a thorough review of 19 laboratory and field studies, including studies submitted by the registrant and others in the public literature. At this time, EPA believes that no additional testing is warranted to address this issue. This meeting decisively finalized many years of debate and cleared atrazine of the bad science previously conducted by biased groups who used fear mongering tactics to promote their environmental agenda.

In June 2003, the EPA evaluated available literature on the potential effects of atrazine on amphibian gonadal development. The agency concluded that while there was sufficient information to formulate a hypothesis that atrazine exposure can affect amphibian gonadal development, there was insufficient information to refute or confirm that hypothesis due to limitations of the study designs and uncertainties in the data.

In a 2003 White Paper on the subject, EPA critically reviewed the data from 19 lab and field studies, discussed remaining uncertainties in determining the potential effects of atrazine on amphibian development, and outlined a tiered approach for future research that could address these uncertainties. A Scientific Advisory Panel reviewed EPA’s White Paper and agreed with its review and the need for future studies.

In response to a November 2004 Data Call-In (DCI) Notice from EPA, Syngenta, the primary atrazine registrant, developed an EPA-approved testing protocol for determining the effects of atrazine on amphibian gonadal development, and went on to conduct two simultaneous studies consistent with the first tier of testing described in the 2003 White Paper. The raw data from these independent studies was submitted to EPA in January 2007 and a final report was provided to EPA in June 2007.

Results showed that exposure to atrazine in concentrations from 0.01 ppb to 100 ppb **had no effect** on the growth, development or sexual differentiation of the test species, *Xenopus laevis*. Frogs were tested over a period of time that included the sensitive window for sexual differentiation and metamorphosis. Therefore, no mode of action relative to the potential for atrazine to feminize amphibians is suggested by these results.

Atrazine has been one of the most commonly used and widely studied herbicides in the U.S. and around the world. Despite its widespread intensive use, atrazine has always been considered safe because of its short half-life and negligible bioaccumulation and biomagnification. It’s unfortunate that atrazine’s “image” over the past 10 years has been “muddied” by certain groups who had a pre-determined agenda to “link” atrazine to the endocrine-disruptor debate. However, the science of atrazine has prevailed and we can only hope that the results from these studies reflect positively on the incredible work that EPA does in implementing FIFRA, safe-guarding our environment, and protecting our natural resources.

DAVIS PRESENTS WSSA RESEARCH PRIORITIES AT USDA-CSREES STAKEHOLDERS MEETING IN DC

On November 20, 2007, the USDA Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES) hosted a one day workshop on stakeholder priorities in the area of plant and pest biology. Over 20 different stakeholder groups provided comments and concerns during the workshop. Dr. Adam Davis, Ecologist with the USDA-ARS Invasive Weed Management Unit in Urbana, Illinois and incoming Chair of the WSSA Research and Competitive Grants Committee traveled to DC to present WSSA's research priorities. Much of Dr. Davis's written comments and presentation were based on a research priorities survey conducted this summer that he and Dr. Dean Riechers, the current WSSA Research Committee chair, developed as well as follow-up review from the WSSA Board of Directors. Many thanks to Adam and Dean for their efforts!

A couple of interesting points that came across during the meeting: 1) USDA CSREES is considering lengthening time of awards for some of its programs, possibly up to 10 years; this could open up many exciting opportunities for longer-term research projects; 2) CSREES staff and stakeholders continue to be very excited about the integrated programs (linking research to substantial outreach components within the project) but these grants are undercompeted => there's a good opportunity here for weed scientists who want to link research and extension.

The following comments were submitted by Dr. Davis on behalf of WSSA:

The mission of the Weed Science Society of America (WSSA), a non-profit professional society, is to "promote research, education, and extension outreach activities related to weeds; provide science-based information to the public and policy makers; and foster awareness of weeds and their impacts on managed and natural ecosystems." Member research on weedy and invasive plants covers a wide spectrum, from fundamental biology to applied management to environmental impacts of weeds and weed management systems. As such, our research priorities overlap with USDA-CSREES strategic goals 2 ("enhance the competitiveness and sustainability of rural and farm economies") and 6 ("protect and enhance the nation's natural resource base and environment").

Weed science as a discipline has had many successes over the years, but its future is in some ways imperiled by its very success. A confluence of factors, including reduced farming system diversity, the widespread adoption of herbicide resistant crops grown in monoculture, a near cessation in herbicide discovery by industry, and lack of herbicide rotation has gradually undermined the foundations of weed management. Herbicide resistant weed biotypes are proliferating at the same time that producer knowledge of the fundamentals of weed management is eroding. We need to add new weed management tools that increase options for the future, and this will require a far better understanding of weed biology and ecology than we currently have. Unfortunately, with the weed management successes of the past have come reduced public and commodity group concern with weeds, consolidation of

industry, and stagnant government funding for weeds. How will we fund the basic and applied science needed to develop the next generation weed management tactics?

The NRI Competitive Grants Program continues to be an important source of research funding for U.S. weed scientists. Several aspects of program 51.9, "Biology of Weedy and Invasive Species in Agroecosystems", however, are of ongoing concern to the WSSA membership. The points raised by Dr. David Shaw, in his 2005 report to the CSREES Stakeholder Workshop are still pressing:

- "Program 51.9 now targets not only weedy and invasive plants, but all other invasive species without an increase in funding. The WSSA would like to point out that NRI Programs 51.2, 51.3 and 51.8 that deal with the biology of arthropods, nematodes, and microorganisms were not opened up to invasion biology for their representative organisms. The WSSA would like to see invasion biology for different species placed in their respective NRI Programs.*
- The current request for application (RFA) for Program 51.9 appears to be focused on ecological studies on invasive species at the population level and above with no emphasis on weed biology at the suborganismal level on physiology, biochemical, genetic, and molecular aspects. This is surprising with recent initiatives on weed genomics. The WSSA would like to see a balance in research priorities that consider both suborganismal and population level weed biology. Furthermore, this balance in research should address current problems using economically relevant species. There has been a recent trend towards funding NRI projects that seem to focus on model systems and invasive species with limited geographic range and little economic relevance in agroecosystems.*
- Only the RFA for Program 51.9 now requires a letter of intent by December 6 after which a committee will decide on invitations by January 1, 2006. This process will not provide much flexibility to consider other programs and limits the grant preparation period to less than 1.5 months."*

Research areas of primary interest to the WSSA membership identified by a 2007 survey include, by category:

- Weed biology and ecology: herbicide resistance; invasion biology; cropping system ecology and crop-weed interactions; transgenic crop cultivars; crop tolerance; weed evolution; genomics; landscape ecology; site-specific management; seed biology; population dynamics; allelopathy*
- Applied weed management: herbicide discovery and efficacy; decision support systems; non-chemical weed management methods; management thresholds; weed management system models; neutraceuticals; biocontrol.*
- Environmental impacts of weeds and weed management systems: herbicide fate and transport in soil, water and air; phytoremediation; drift management*

DITAMASO AND BARNEY PRESENT CAST ISSUE PAPER ON BIOFUELS AND INVASIVE WEEDS ON CAPITOL HILL

The Council for Agricultural Science and Technology (CAST) released a new CAST Commentary titled, **Biofuel Feedstocks: The Risk of Future Invasions**. The paper was written by WSSA members Dr. Joseph DiTomaso, Dr. Jacob Barney, and Dr. Alison Fox, reviewed by Dr. Steven Dewey and Dr. Jodie Holt and facilitated by Dr. Kassim Al-Khatib, who is the current CAST President and WSSA Past-President. The WSSA is very fortunate to have such great talent and leadership within the National and Regional Weed Science Societies!

The objectives of the CAST Commentary paper were to describe the potential risk of dedicated lignocellulose biofuel species becoming weedy or invasive, and to provide a process to quantify and, subsequently, minimize this risk. Several of the candidate biofuel feedstock species being considered for commercial production in the United States are invasive weeds in other regions where they have been introduced. The critical questions addressed in the DiTomaso, Barney and Fox commentary paper include the following:

- What similarities exist between agronomic and invasive traits?
- How will genetic modification affect potential invasiveness?
- How can future invasions be mitigated?
- What are the policy implications with regard to economic or ecological damage?

The full text of **Biofuel Feedstocks: The Risk of Future Invasions** can be found at:

<http://www.cast-science.org/websiteUploads/publicationPDFs/Biofuels%20Commentary%20Web%20version%20with%20color%20%207927146.pdf>



“L to R: CAST Executive V.P. John Bonner, WSSA members Jacob Barney and Joe DiTomaso, and American Society of Agronomy members Wally Wilhelm and Steven Fales pause for a photo op on the terrace outside of the House Agriculture Committee after the presentation of two CAST issue papers to over 70 Capitol Hill Staffers.”

WATER RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT ACT BECOMES LAW

The Senate dealt President Bush the first veto override of his presidency on November 8, with its 79-14 vote to adopt the \$23.2 billion Water Resources Development Act (Public Law No: 110-114) authorizing a huge number of water resource projects across the nation. There is something in this bill for every Congressional district in the country. The Senate action occurred two days after the House voted 361-54 to override the veto of the WRDA

legislation that supporters said would bring much-needed improvements to the nation's water transportation infrastructure and help expand wildlife habitat programs. The new law authorizes funding for **hundreds** of projects and initiatives across the U.S. including 43 aquatic ecosystem restoration studies in 20 states that will address the spread of aquatic invasive species. Other major initiatives in the Act include continued restoration for the Florida Everglades and the coastal wetlands of Louisiana, prevention of further shoreline and streambank degradation, and improved shipping on the Mississippi River.

If you want to find out which water resources projects are authorized in your state, you can search the 250 + pages of the WRDA at: http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=110_cong_bills&docid=f:h1495enr.txt.pdf. Please keep in mind that “authorized” projects does not necessarily mean that they will be “appropriated” projects.

PESTICIDE REGISTRATION IMPROVEMENT ACT RENEWED

The House and Senate passed the Pesticide Registration Improvement Renewal Act, also known as PRIA 2, without hardly any fanfare this fall. The legislation renews the Pesticide Registration Improvement Act (PRIA 1) for five more years until 2012. PRIA 1 amended the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA) in 2003 to allow EPA to collect pesticide registration service fees from registrants in return for a more predictable and typically shorter evaluation process. In addition, new reduced risk pesticides get “fast track” review due to their perceived environmental benefits. PRIA 2 also provides new funding for a pesticide safety education program, to ensure that these products are applied safely.

NEW AGRICULTURE SECRETARY NOMINATED

In a surprise move on October 31, President Bush nominated former North Dakota Governor Ed Schafer (R) to be Secretary of Agriculture. If confirmed by the Senate, Schafer would replace Mike Johanns, who resigned from the post in September to run for the U.S. Senate seat held by retiring Republican Chuck Hagel of Nebraska. Bush's nomination of Schafer surprised many Washington, DC-insiders who assumed Acting Secretary Charles F. Conner would continue to hold the post. In his capacity as Deputy Secretary under Johanns, Conner played an instrumental role in constructing the Administration's farm bill proposal.

FARM BILL STALLED IN SENATE

Progress on the 2007 Farm Bill stalled during November 5-9, the first scheduled week of floor debate, over partisan wrangling about the amendment process. The five-year \$288 billion measure covers programs including nutrition, research, energy, conservation, rural development, and crop commodity payments. The 2002 Farm Bill expired on September 30.

As of December 5, a few people think that the Senate Farm Bill could still get through the Senate before Christmas if Senate leaders can finalize an agreement on limiting the number

of amendments to be offered by both parties. However, that doesn't seem likely. It's basically been a big game of finger pointing and window dressing by both parties and the odds are pretty good that we will see a 1 to 2 year extension of the current law.

As for the Research Title, the WSSA favors the House's version of the Farm Bill that was passed in July. The House Farm Bill protects the \$200 million in mandatory research funding for the Initiative for Future Agriculture and Food Systems (IFAFS) that is scheduled to become available in FY2010. The IFAFS program was created in 1998 to provide a source of mandatory funding for integrated competitive programs sponsored by the land-grant universities. Since its inception, however, IFAFS funds have been "stripped out for other uses" in all but two years by the Appropriations Committees, the Office of Management and Budget and Committees on Agriculture via the budget reconciliation process. Nonetheless, the land-grant system has worked hard to reverse this situation in light of the tremendous unfunded needs -- in areas as diverse as human nutrition and biofuels -- that must be addressed through programs where scientific research is directly linked to public outreach. The Senate version of the Farm Bill had the IFAFS funding stripped out entirely during the Ag Committee markup and the agricultural research coalitions that we are members of have been working hard to get that money restored. However, our backs are against the wall with the Senate version because any "new" money has to be offset by taking it away from another part of the Farm Bill.

Another reason the WSSA supports the House-passed Farm Bill Research Title is the way the National Institute for Food and Agriculture (NIFA) would be organized within the USDA Research, Extension, and Economic (REE) mission area. The Senate version would basically duplicate responsibilities between the USDA Under Secretary for REE and the NIFA Director, since the NIFA Director would report directly to the Secretary.

USDA CONCLUDES GENETICALLY ENGINEERED CREEPING BENTGRASS INVESTIGATION

On November 26, 2007, the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) concluded its investigation into alleged compliance infractions by The Scotts Company, LLC. The investigation related to regulated genetically engineered glyphosate-tolerant creeping bentgrass. Under the settlement agreement, Scotts has agreed to pay a civil penalty of \$500,000 which is the maximum penalty allowed by the Plant Protection Act of 2000.

Read more:

<http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usdahome?contentidonly=true&contentid=2007/11/0350.xml>

NEW E-LEARNING WEBSITE ON INVASIVE PLANT MANAGEMENT ISSUES

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Center for Invasive Plant Management announced a new e-learning website aimed at engaging volunteers and the public in invasive plant issues and management. Designed for National Wildlife Refuge volunteers and Friends groups, the website provides science-based, introductory information that is suitable for anyone interested in learning about invasive plants. The five self-study modules address the

purpose and history of the Refuge System, how volunteers help in invasive plant management, how refuges manage invasive plants, and tips for community outreach. Each module contains a quiz and web-based resources that enable learners to explore topics more thoroughly.

The website is part of a larger program carried out by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service in conjunction with partners, such as the National Wildlife Refuge Association, to engage volunteers in managing invasive species on National Wildlife Refuges. This program includes competitive grants and training in how to map invasive plant infestations using hand-held computers and GPS devices. More information at:

<http://www.fws.gov/invasives/volunteersTrainingModule/index.html>

NIWAW 9 IS FEBRUARY 24-29, 2008

The 9th National Invasive Weed Awareness Week (NIWAW 9) will be held in Washington, D.C. the week of February 24 to February 29, 2008 to bring people and groups from across the country together to focus national attention on the severe impacts caused by invasive weeds. Individuals and organizations interested in this issue are invited to participate in this event and help build on the success of NIWAW activities in previous years. NIWAW 9 events are designed to focus on the important roles the Federal government must play to help the U.S. deal with invasive weed problems. We have also designed the schedule to provide ample time for attendees to meet with their Congressional delegations, individual federal agencies and each other.

The theme for NIWAW 9 is “Weeds won’t wait: Don’t hesitate”. The six invasive weeds that will be featured on this year’s poster are: beach vitex, cheatgrass, giant salvinia, Japanese stiltgrass, Russian olive, and yellow starthistle. This year will be the first year we will be setting up easels and 4’ X 4’ poster boards at the hotel for **participants to display their research**, case studies and other invasive weed related issues. The headquarters hotel for NIWAW 9 is the Four Points by Sheraton Hotel, 1201 K Street NW, Washington, DC. The deadline for the “NIWAW Block” hotel reservations (202-289-7600) is **January 24, 2008**.

The registration fee for NIWAW 9 is \$100 and the **deadline is February 1, 2008**. NIWAW 9 registration, an invitation, an on-line version of the NIWAW 9 poster, a draft agenda and previous partners and sponsors can be found at:

<http://www.wssa.net/Meetings/Invasive/index.htm>

DERR AND SHAW PARTICIPATE IN AAAS LEADERSHIP TRAINING IN DC

During the week of November 12 -16, WSSA President-Elect Jeff Derr and WSSA Vice President David Shaw attended the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) Leadership training program on Science and Technology policy. Dr. Derr was kind enough to write a report to the WSSA Board following the completion of their week here in Washington, DC. Below is most of his report. Thanks Jeff!

The week-long program contained AAAS presenters along with guest speakers on a wide variety of topics. Some of the topics discussed were the fit of science in public policy, nanotechnology, stem cell research, energy policy/climate change, the space program, strategic weapons, ethics, and evolution. There was a diverse set of attendees, including two from NASA, five international attendees including three connected to the British embassy, two from the USDA Forest Service, one from USGS, and one from the American Chemical Society, plus researchers and grants people from various universities, among others. There were about 35 attendees total. One common comment I received was “I didn’t know there was a Weed Science Society of America”. One attendee even googled us.

We had Judy Schneider address us on Congress – its structure and Policy. She probably was one of the best speakers of the week. If you ever have the opportunity to hear her speak, take advantage of the opportunity.

Francis Slakely from the American Physical Society gave an excellent presentation on how a scientist can interact with a congressional office. He mentioned 4 numbers in his presentation: \$10,000 – the amount of money a member of the House of Representatives needs to raise each week for 2 years for his/her re-election; 110,000 – the average number of votes needed for a representative to get elected; 7 minutes – the average time a house staffer has to spend on each contact (phone call, email, etc.) a representative receives; and 8 months – the average length of time a house staffer is in their position.

We heard from 3 lobbyists, one from the University of Michigan, one from United Technologies, and one from a private firm. John Marburger, the Director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy spoke to us, along with the Executive Director of Research! America, and a former Representative, John Edward Porter. Kei Koizumi gave a good talk on the Federal budget.

While we were in DC, David, Lee Van Wychen and I were able to meet with Rob Hedberg and USDA Under Secretary Gale Buchanan. We discussed concerns we had about cutting of funds for the National Agricultural Statistics Survey (NASS) to do pesticide use surveys. If the use surveys are cut, government agencies would instead rely on surveys from private companies (Doane) which would not be publicly available like NASS data. We also discussed NRI funding for weed science research and our concerns about funds potentially being shifted to other invasive species. Dr. Buchanan discussed the need for societies to support the President’s budget. We also need to congratulate David Shaw for being named a Fellow in AAAS. Dr. Buchanan supported David’s nomination.

Overall, I feel the AAAS program was worthwhile, although it is more of an educational program than leadership training. However, to be able to speak in DC on issues, one does need to be knowledgeable on how Congress works, along with understanding the issues involved in the interaction between science and public policy.

*Jeffrey F. Derr
WSSA President-Elect*

VAN WYCHEN, JACKSON ATTEND 2007 ASSOCIATION OF FISH AND WILDLIFE AGENCIES (AFWA) MEETING

The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) annual meeting was held September 16-21 in Louisville, KY. AFWA represents all of North America's fish and wildlife agencies promoting sound management and conservation, speaking with a unified voice on important fish and wildlife issues. Our primary goal was to build relationships and identify areas of common interest shared by WSSA and AFWA regarding the impacts of weeds and invasive plants on wildlife habitat. AFWA considers invasive plants as one of the greatest challenges to wildlife and fisheries management in the 21st century.

In 2005, AFWA established an Invasive Species Committee to provide a national forum for coordinated action among state and federal agencies, and provide a foundation for development of a strategic AFWA invasive species plan. Federal land management agencies commit millions of dollars to fighting invasive species and strategic coordination among state and federal agencies is critical to the conservation and expansion of existing wildlife and fisheries habitat. During the past year, the AFWA Invasive Species committee completed coordination with the National Wildlife Federation on joint letter of support to Congress regarding reauthorization of comprehensive invasive species legislation and finished the review of an invasive species script for a new video being developed by the Wildlife Forever Foundation and the US Forest Service targeting hunters and anglers. The Committee will continue to work with Wildlife Forever Foundation and the US Forest Service to explore the concept of a jointly funded Inter-Agency Personnel Agreement (IPA) for a State Employee to collaborate with Wildlife Forever in the development and deployment of messages targeted at hunters, anglers and outdoors persons to join in the effort to stop invasive hitchhikers.

AFWA will again be represented at the National Invasive Weeds Awareness Week (NIWAW) activities in Washington, D.C. John Kennedy with the Wyoming Game and Fish Dept. and chair of the AFWA Invasive Species Committee is committed to continued partnership with NIWAW. For more information about the AFWA Invasives Species Committee or to become a member, please contact Amber Pairis at 202-624-7890 or apairis@fishwildlife.org.

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