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Washington, DC 20515

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEES:
DEFENSE
HOMELAND SECURITY

April 16, 2025

Chair Hageman, Ranking Member Hoyle and Members of the Subcommittee:

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify today in strong support of my bill, the National Wildlife Refuge System Invasive Species Strike Team Act (H.R. 4219), which I co-introduced with Congressman James Moylan.

Invasive species represent one of the most urgent and far-reaching threats to our natural environment. They disrupt the delicate balance of ecosystems by outcompeting native species, preying upon them and introducing new diseases. The consequences are severe, including declines in biodiversity, weakened ecosystem resilience and cascading economic impacts across sectors such as agriculture, forestry and fisheries.

While this is a national issue, nowhere are these impacts more acute than in Hawai'i. Due to its geographic isolation, Hawai'i is home to a remarkable number of endemic species found nowhere else on Earth. Yet these same species often lack the defenses necessary to withstand invasive threats. As a result, invasive species have caused profound ecological damage across the islands, threatening native forests, imperiling bird populations, undermining food security and affecting daily quality of life.

Protecting Hawaii's biodiversity is not only an environmental responsibility, but also a cultural imperative tied directly to the heritage and identity of the Hawaiian people.

Addressing invasive species requires a coordinated, strategic approach focused on prevention, early detection and rapid response. That is precisely what H.R. 4219 seeks to strengthen.

This legislation codifies the Invasive Species Strike Teams program within the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, an already proven on-the-ground model that delivers targeted, cost-effective responses to emerging threats. With 21 teams strategically positioned across the country, these specialists provide surge capacity, technical expertise and rapid deployment capabilities to address invasive species before they become entrenched and far more costly to manage.

The success of this model is not theoretical; it is well documented.

In Hawai‘i, the Hawaiian and Pacific Islands Invasive Species Strike Team has played a critical role in responding to post-disturbance invasive threats. Following a 2015 wildfire that burned approximately 180 acres of native koa and ‘ōhi‘a forest along the boundary of the O‘ahu Forest National Wildlife Refuge, invasive plant species rapidly colonized the damaged landscape. Strike Teams deployed early detection and rapid response strategies across the affected area, conducting hundreds of acres of treatment to suppress invasive grasses and woody species.

Through sustained management efforts, the response has evolved from broad-scale treatment to targeted control of high-risk invasive trees such as paperbark, albizia and acacia. In just two days of focused operations, teams treated more than 800 invasive plants across 12 acres, targeting species at critical stages of maturity to prevent further spread. These efforts are helping to preserve the recovering native canopy and prevent invasive-dominated forests from taking hold, demonstrating how timely intervention can shape long-term ecological outcomes.

At Kīlauea Point National Wildlife Refuge, Strike Teams also helped implement the largest predator-proof fence in the United States, followed by the successful removal of invasive predators such as feral pigs and cats. The result has been a dramatic rebound in seabird nesting success, with species like the Laysan albatross and red-tailed tropicbird achieving their highest nesting numbers in decades.

Similarly, in Guam, Strike Teams partnered with federal wildlife specialists to test and refine effective methods for managing feral pig populations. By identifying and deploying the most effective trapping strategies, they removed more than 100 pigs from sensitive refuge areas, demonstrating how applied science and collaboration can yield immediate practical results.

These examples underscore that early coordinated intervention saves money, protects ecosystems and prevents long-term damage.

H.R. 4219 builds on this success by formally establishing the Strike Teams program in statute, ensuring consistent funding, accountability and long-term stability. The bill authorizes \$15 million annually from Fiscal Years 2025 through 2029, aligning with current investment levels while providing the certainty needed for sustained operations.

Importantly, the legislation also strengthens coordination and ensures the program’s ability to operate beyond refuge boundaries when necessary. Invasive species do not respect jurisdictional lines and allowing Strike Teams to provide technical assistance, financial support and cooperative agreements for ecologically connected lands is both practical and cost-effective. Addressing threats early wherever they emerge reduces the burden on federal lands and taxpayers alike.

Additionally, the bill enhances interagency collaboration, enabling other federal departments to leverage Strike Team expertise in responding to invasive species threats. This all-hands-on-deck approach reflects the scale and urgency of the challenge we face.

The global and national costs of invasive species continue to rise, impacting food systems, economies, public health and cultural resources. Without proactive investment, these challenges will only intensify.

H.R. 4219 represents a strategic and necessary step forward. It transitions us from a reactive approach to one that is grounded in proven success and designed for the future.

I urge my colleagues to support this legislation and ensure that we are equipped to protect our nation's natural resources for generations to come.

Mahalo,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ed Case". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Ed Case
Member of Congress