



COMMITTEE ON
**ENVIRONMENT
AND PUBLIC WORKS**

United States Senator James M. Jeffords, I - Vt.
Chairman

**Statement of Senator Jim Jeffords
Silent Invasion
October 10, 2002**

I am very pleased to join the National Wildlife Refuge Association, on the eve of the 100th anniversary of National Wildlife Refuge System, to address a serious crisis that jeopardizes the future of refuges and other conservation lands and waters across the country. In their report, *Silent Invasion*, the NWRRA is promotes innovative solutions that highlight the role citizens can play in helping to identify and eradicate invasives, while also promoting collaboration among federal and state agencies along with private partners.

Invasive species are insects, plants and animals that are not native to an ecosystem and destroy indigenous wildlife and their habitats, cause economic damage and represent a threat to human health. Currently, invasives cause more than \$100 billion damage annually in the U.S. and invasive plants alone have invaded more than 100 million acres of land nationwide. Nearly eight million of those acres are in National Wildlife Refuges.

Prevention is the key word in this battle to protect our national Refuges. Educating and mobilizing of a nationwide network volunteers is a cost-effective and practical solution. Simultaneously, building partnerships among refuges, other state and federal lands, and private landowners is critical to solving this ecological threat. Moreover, it is especially important today to find economical ways to solve important domestic problems, as we face major budget divisions in Congress and the possibility of war.

Invasives threaten all parts of this country - Vermont and other New England states are not exempt. Silvio Conte NWR, for example, is threatened by a number of plant species including water chestnut. Recently, a group of volunteers were recruited for an "emergency pull" and succeeded in pulling 10 tons water chestnut!

Imagine if we could organize groups like this one all across the country? Educating and activating people to care about their environment is a huge step towards national awareness about conservation the preservation of the planet.

Invasive species are a leading threat to our wildlife and economy. Congress needs to ensure that the funding and resources are available to effectively combat this threat to America's wildlife heritage.

- 30 -