

NPSO Legislative 2017, SB 789 TESTIMONY

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Arundo donax is very attractive as a biofuel, and as fiber for laminated building materials and paper products.

In 2015 the House Agriculture Committee held a hearing on HB2183. It was an attempt to set a bonding level for the use of Arundo donax commensurate to the threat it poses. I had just cited a report from a Sierra Club article about the use of Arundo donax for cellulosic ethanol production in one of the Carolinas.

A Committee member asked for the date of the publication and the page number of the article. She thought the use of Arundo donax for the production of cellulosic ethanol might be of interest to parties in her district. The Member wanted to know the name of the Italian company that had already built two such plants, and was considering building a third. Clearly, many organizations find the commercial planting of Arundo donax to be an interesting business proposition.

Arundo donax has many current and proposed uses.

Some of these are for paper, some are for building materials, and some are for use in the biofuel industry.

How does this all play out in Eastern Oregon, or any agricultural area in Oregon, for that matter?

I learned a lot when I was privileged to go with Senator Dembrow's constituents and interested individuals on a visit to Senator Hansell's very large senate district, specifically in the Boardman area.

The level of agricultural technology included everything from a “bio-solids” energy facility, to sensor monitored irrigation and satellite guided tillage at 3 Mile Canyon Dairy Farm.

The thing that really struck me I learned while riding from one facility to another, listening to a local water expert describe soil depths in relation to aquifer potentials. Many of the soils in that area are marginally thin and demand a complex rotation of crops. This requires a level of cooperation between family farms that is as amazing as it is essential. Economically viable crops of potatoes, mint, and onions are only possible with yearly rotation.

Each family farm has a specialty, and they all cooperate in an amazing agricultural effort. It reminded me of a barn dance in which every individual has an important part to play if that square dance is going to work out as hoped.

If crops like *Arundo donax* are allowed into this mix, it may very well spell the end of the family farm as we now know it, at least in Eastern Oregon.

Why is this? Because the cycle of crop rotation would be irrevocably broken. That means the razor-thin, economic margins routinely mastered by savvy Oregon farmers will become untenable.

It will be an economic domino effect. As one farm goes under the essential skill for effective rotation of crops in that area is compromised. That leads to crushingly thin margins for other family farms, and they go under, too.

SB 7899 is designed to give shelter to those who choose to grow *Arundo donax* or any other invasive species for biofuel purposes.

As much as I wish they would not, and as much as I fear for the survival of all of Eastern Oregon's family farms if they do, I want to be sure that any Oregon farmer has the protection they need if they choose this path, as is their inalienable right.

Arundo donax always escapes large populations once they are established.

It can run up to 39,000 dollars per acre to eradicate, as documented in the California Invasive Plant Council's report to the California Water System as you can see in the submitted testimony.

When it inevitably escapes, who pays the price for eradication?

If the Oregon family farm gets stuck with the tab, chances are they won't make their margin, and will fail. SB 789, The Oregon Biofuel Farmers Protection Bill puts the onus of costly eradication on the business entities that contract with Oregon farmers to grow biofuel crops that are invasive species.

If farmers go bankrupt trying to cover the costs of eradication, that would leave no entity responsible for stopping the spread of Arundo donax. That leaves the State of Oregon to absorb the cost of eradication. If escaped biofuels like Arundo donax are not eradicated, Oregonians, Washingtonians, and all citizens of the Columbia River System will experience what Californians already know.

Arundo donax has relentlessly moved the entire distance from the Santa Ana River in Southern California to a little creek just south of our southern border with California, with feral populations already colonizing the Talent area in Southern Oregon. Unchecked, it will colonize every streamside habitat in the Columbia River System. That will result in a huge monoculture throughout the Columbia River drainage, spreading onto the beaches of the Pacific Northwest.





















