October 4, 2012

Mr. Boris Bershteyn, Acting Administrator

Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs

Office of Management and Budget

725 17th 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.[[1]](#endnote-1) 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.[[2]](#endnote-2) *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[[3]](#endnote-3) California,[[4]](#endnote-4) Colorado[[5]](#endnote-5), and Nevada.[[6]](#endnote-6) Additionally, it has been noted as either invasive or a serious risk in New Mexico, Alabama, and South Carolina.[[7]](#endnote-7) 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.[[8]](#endnote-8)

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

Altahama 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

Illinois Native Plant Society

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 Association of Exotic Pest Plant Councils

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

Ohio Invasive Plant Council

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

Quinault/Queets Cooperative Weed Management Area (WA)

River Network

San Diego Coastkeeper

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)

1. 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. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. USDA APHIS. 2012 [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. USDA NRCS. “Invasive and Noxious Weeds.” <http://plants.usda.gov/java/noxious?rptType=State&statefips=48> (accessed March 8, 2012). [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. California Department of Food and Agriculture. “Encyloweedia: Data Sheets.” <http://www.cdfa.ca.gov/plant/ipc/weedinfo/winfo_list-pestrating.htm> (accessed March 8, 2012). [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Colorado Department of Agriculture. “Noxious Weed Management Program.” <http://www.colorado.gov/cs/Satellite/Agriculture-Main/CDAG/1174084048733> (accessed March 8, 2012). [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Nevada Department of Agriculture. “Noxious Weed List.” <http://agri.nv.gov/nwac/PLANT_NoxWeedList.htm> (Last modified February 2, 2012). [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Florida Native Plant Society. “Florida Native Plant Society Policy Statement on *Arundo donax*.” <http://www.fnps.org/committees/policy/pdfs/policyarundo_policy_statement1.pdf> (Last updated November 6,2006). [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Giessow, J., J. Casanova, R. Leclerc, G. Fleming, and J. Giessow. 2011. *Arundo donax* (Giant Reed): Distribution and Impact Report. *California Invasive Plant Council*. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)