EXHIBIT Z
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SB 343

Testimony on SB 343 Invasive Species
Ron de Yong, Director of Agriculture

Montana is confronted with a very large potential problem -- invasive species.

1. The current poster child is Zebra and Quagga mussels. They are prevalent east of the Mississippi and have cost those states billions of dollars.
2. Their prolific population growth destroys water related agricultural facilities, public water infrastructure, and recreation.
3. Recently they have been discovered in AZ, CA, NV, CO and UT. We currently have no way to prevent a boat from the Southwest or East from contaminating Flathead Lake or Fort Peck.
4. With current resources we would not even find the problem until it had started to explode and then containment efforts would be limited as well.
5. This is what happened to us over 50 years ago with Spotted Knapweed and Leafy Spurge.
6. The problem of Zebra and Quagga mussels would fall in large part upon FW&P because they handle Aquatic Nuisance Species but they don't have the resources to address the problem.

An additional problem is that Noxon and Cabinet Gorge reservoirs in NW Montana have Eurasian Watermilfoil and Curlyleaf Pond Weed, which have effectively blocked many bays to boats and even fish.

1. These aquatic weeds are costing Idaho millions of dollars.
2. The agencies involved are Agriculture and Fish, Wildlife and Parks.
3. Neither agency has the resources to diminish and fully contain this problem and prevent contamination of the rest of Montana.

The Department of Agriculture is thoroughly involved with this issue because the next poster child may be a terrestrial invasive. For instance, the department is currently addressing the problem of large populations of Yellow Star Thistle and Rush Skeletonweed in Idaho crossing our borders with inadequate resources available for prevention.

The problem of invasives will continue to increase as:

1. the number of people and traffic from other states increases.
2. the number of recreationalists increases.
3. with our now generally milder winters and longer growing season.

Additional resources are needed for a strategic plan that addresses education and prevention with check stations in priority areas. Resources are also needed to contain and eliminate invasives in management areas before populations explode. Current national, regional and state programs were developed to address specific problem areas and lack an overall coordinated approach. Without an overall coordinated approach we will continue to have gaps in authority and funding and will not be able to address the problem of invasives quickly and effectively.

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Consensus among all interested parties in pre-legislative discussions was to house the coordinator in the Department of Agriculture. Our experience with the noxious weed program can be expanded to cover all invasive species within FWP, Agriculture and other agencies, including existing gaps in funding and authority.

Education, prevention and containment are key and significant progress can be made with Senate Bill 343, additional resources provided in HB2 and existing programs in Agriculture, Fish Wildlife and Parks and other agencies.