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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

[Docket No. APHIS-2016-0069]

Availability of an Environmental Assessment for the Biological Control of Giant Reed

AGENCY: Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice of availability and request for comments.

SUMMARY: We are advising the public that the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service has prepared a draft environmental assessment relative to the control of giant reed (Arundo donax). The environmental assessment considers the effects of, and alternatives to, the field release of a gall-forming fly, Lasioptera donacis, into the continental United States for use as a biological control agent to reduce the severity of giant reed infestations. We are making the environmental assessment available to the public for review and comment.

DATES: We will consider all comments that we receive on or before [Insert date 30 days after date of publication in the Federal Register].

ADDRESSES: You may submit comments by either of the following methods:

- Federal eRulemaking Portal: Go to <http://www.regulations.gov/#!docketDetail;D=APHIS-2016-0069>.
- Postal Mail/Commercial Delivery: Send your comment to Docket No. APHIS-2016-0069, Regulatory Analysis and Development, PPD, APHIS, Station 3A-03.8, 4700 River Road Unit 118, Riverdale, MD 20737-1238.

Supporting documents and any comments we receive on this docket may be viewed at <http://www.regulations.gov/#!docketDetail;D=APHIS-2016-0069> or in our reading room, which is located in room 1141 of the USDA South Building, 14th Street and Independence Avenue SW., Washington, DC. Normal reading room hours are 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, except holidays. To be sure someone is there to help you, please call (202) 799-7039 before coming.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Dr. Colin D. Stewart, Assistant Director, Pests, Pathogens, and Biocontrol Permits Permitting and Compliance Coordination, PPQ, APHIS, 4700 River Road Unit 133, Riverdale, MD 20737-1231; (301) 851-2327, email: Colin.D.Stewart@aphis.usda.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Giant reed (*Arundo donax*), a native of the Mediterranean and Middle East, has become one of the most pervasive non-native plants to invade the riparian areas of the Southwest United States, especially in California and the Rio Grande area of Texas. Giant reed infestations in riparian habitats lead to loss of biodiversity, stream bank erosion, altered channel morphology, damage to bridges, increased costs for chemical and mechanical control along transportation corridors, and impediment of law enforcement activities on the international border. Many Federal and State agencies, as well as private entities, conduct programs to manage giant reed, as well as other invasive weeds. The Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) is proposing to issue permits for the field release of a gall-forming fly, *Lasioptera donacis*, into the continental United States to reduce the severity of giant reed infestations.

APHIS' review and analysis of the proposed action are documented in detail in a draft environmental assessment (EA) entitled "Field release of the European leaf sheath mining midge, Lasioptera donacis Coutin (Diptera: Cecidomyiidae), for biological control of giant reed, Arundo donax L. (Poales: Poaceae) in the Contiguous United States" (April 2016). We are making the EA available to the public for review and comment. We will consider all comments that we receive on or before the date listed under the heading DATES at the beginning of this notice.

The EA may be viewed on the Regulations.gov Web site or in our reading room (see ADDRESSES above for a link to Regulations.gov and information on the location and hours of the reading room). You may request paper copies of the EA by calling or writing to the person listed under FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT. Please refer to the title of the EA when requesting copies.

The EA has been prepared in accordance with: (1) The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), as amended (42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.); (2) regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality for implementing the procedural provisions of NEPA (40 CFR parts 1500-1508); (3) USDA regulations implementing NEPA (7 CFR part 1b); and (4) APHIS' NEPA Implementing Procedures (7 CFR part 372).

Done in Washington, DC, this 2nd day of November 2016.

Kevin Shea,

Administrator, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.

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