

**Opening Statement
Chairman Raúl M. Grijalva
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands
Buffelgrass Tucson Field Hearing
April 10, 2010**

The Subcommittee will now come to order. Thank you.

On a beautiful day like today, it's tough to sit inside, but the business at hand is vital to everyone in the state. The issue we will address today truly hits home for me. I grew up here, my wife and I raised our daughters here, and like most of the people in this room, I know this landscape very well.

As you made your way to City Hall today, you saw why we chose to call this place home: the Palo Verdes blooming along the Santa Cruz, fragrant desert willows lining the washes, prickly pears flowering by the side of the road. This is the natural beauty that makes Tucson so special.

This splendor in our own backyard is vital to Tucson and southern Arizona's leading industry – tourism. Those saguaro cacti covering the hills and mountainsides near our homes – that is what people everywhere picture in their mind's eye when they think of Tucson. Arizona's iconic beauty continues to draw millions of visitors to this paradise every year.

Yet we face an imminent threat to this precious landscape. For the last 50 years, buffelgrass has spread so rapidly that large portions of Pima and surrounding counties are now covered with this invading weed. Throughout southern Arizona, this noxious plant flourished wherever it has gone.

Buffelgrass burns hotter and more frequently than native grasses. A small, isolated fire in native plants is unlikely to harm many saguaros. But if a fire takes hold in a saguaro forest with a large infestation of buffelgrass, that forest could be completely wiped out.

And climate change will only makes matters worse – it will create conditions that encourage buffelgrass to spread ever further north, as if marching across the state. If we fail to fight this invasion, this exotic weed could forever change the landscape that we so love.

Many of you have played a crucial role in slowing the spread of this weed and you have my thanks. You have spent thousands of hours pulling weeds, protecting our homes and preserving this desert. I know that the city and county, as well as our friends at Saguaro National Park, in the national forests and the Bureau of Land Management, not to mention hundreds of home owners and residents, continue to work on addressing this problem collaboratively and in earnest.

Today, we will hear from many of those on the front line about methods they have found to be effective in the battle against this weed. And I look forward to their recommendations on how to better coordinate and support those efforts.

With that, I think we are ready to begin hearing from our witnesses.