

Statement for the Record
U.S. Department of the Interior
House Natural Resources Committee
Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife
on
H.R. 6761 – Murder Hornet Eradication Act

June 25, 2020

Thank you for the opportunity to provide the Department of the Interior’s (Department) views on H.R. 6761, requiring the Secretary of the Interior to establish a grant program to provide financial assistance to States in eradicating the Asian giant hornet. Under this authorization, the Secretary would provide financial assistance to States for management, research, and public education activities necessary to eradicate the Asian giant hornet; and restore bee populations damaged by the Asian giant hornet.

The Department supports efforts to manage invasive species, particularly efforts to detect and respond rapidly to eradicate those species that are newly discovered in the United States and that pose risks to human health, our economy, and the environment, but cannot support the bill as drafted. We recognize the threat that Asian giant hornets pose to bees, particularly honeybees, and believe that the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) is better positioned, given its authority under the Plant Protection Act, to fulfill the roles and responsibilities as outlined in H.R. 6761.

Since the detection of the Asian giant hornet in the United States in 2019, APHIS has been the lead federal agency working in close coordination with the Washington State Department of Agriculture and other affected agencies and stakeholders. APHIS is providing technical support and funding to implement monitoring, trapping, communication, education, and other activities to enable an effective response. Currently, monitoring is a critical priority in order to identify the extent of established hives, which can then be treated. APHIS also has prepared, in cooperation with the Washington State Department of Agriculture, a Draft Environmental Assessment (EA), subject to review and modification, to detect and eradicate Asian giant hornet from Washington State.

In addition to recommending that USDA be the lead agency for implementation of H.R. 6761, we recommend that the Committee consider the following amendments to the legislation. First, federally recognized Indian Tribes should be included as entities eligible for receiving grants. The language should also reflect that APHIS primarily uses cooperative agreements, not grants, when carrying out projects with States and other entities. In addition, we recommend that monitoring be included as an eligible action, in addition to management, research, and public education. The legislation should also specify whether the restoration of bee populations is focused on honeybees, native bees, or both. Finally, the legislation should acknowledge the importance of coordination across the federal government, particularly between USDA and the Department, and with states and tribes. We would also suggest that the bill be renamed to the “Asian Giant Hornet Eradication Act” to more accurately reflect the common name of this invasive species.

An alternative approach, since APHIS already has sufficient authority to carry out these actions, would be to redirect the authorization of appropriations in the bill directly to APHIS' specialty crop line item, which could fund activities consistent with the legislation.

Departmental bureaus in the Pacific Northwest are working in coordination with APHIS, State agencies, and other partners to assist with monitoring, trapping, education, communication, and research on the Asian giant hornet, and are particularly concerned about potential impacts to native bees and other pollinators. We are also heavily engaged in efforts to coordinate across the federal government and with others to strengthen early detection and rapid response capabilities for invasive species. The Department appreciates the Committee's desire to support states in their efforts to eradicate the Asian giant hornet, and recommends the changes outlined in this statement.