Gov. Perry Encourages Awareness of Invasive Species and Aggressive Action to Combat Them

"Giant Salvinia spreading to Texas lakes, boat by boat"

*Note - Gov. Perry frequently departs from prepared remarks.

Thursday, April 01, 2010

Thank you, Peter [Holt, Chair, TX Parks & Wildlife Commission] and thank you all for being here today.

On a beautiful day like this, we’re all reminded of what a blessing it is to live in Texas. I dare you to name a more beautiful state.

It’s an honor to be here today with the members of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, the folks who steward the natural beauty of our state, and make it easier for us all to enjoy the great outdoors.

As we stand here with this pristine lake behind us, it’s hard to imagine it being anything but clear and beautiful, but the spread of invasive species across our state could turn it into a sun-starved dead zone, if we don’t act together and act now.

Fortunately, there is a movement picking up speed here in Texas, led by the experts at Texas Parks and Wildlife, who have partnered with a variety of deeply concerned and highly gifted organizations from the public and private sectors.

People who study these things closely know that completely eradicating an invasive species is a fool’s errand, because life has a way of getting a toe-hold and hanging on, but there are proven steps we can take to control these threats, slow their spread or even prevent their arrival.

I believe one of the key components of any successful undertaking is a well-informed public, especially when that public is made up of Texans. Given accurate information about the true impact of these species, Texans will
make the right choices, and do their part to keep our lakes clear.

So let me boil it down: this Giant Salvinia threat is the real deal.

If we don't get a handle on it and the other invasive species that are working their way into our ecosystem, the Texas we know and love will be changed forever, and not for the better.

Invasive plants and animals tend to shoulder aside native plants and animals and throw the ecosystem out of whack. In the process, they cost Texans millions of dollars, disrupt recreational use, and destroy our natural heritage.

Across the country, invasive species cost the U.S. economy and estimated $35 billion per year. Here in Texas, just one species, the red imported fire ant, not only causes a lot of red welts from their bites, they also cause more than $256 million in damages per year.

Invasive plants like water hyacinth, hydrilla, and giant salvinia, not only harm water quality and biodiversity, they also block recreational access to public waters. If you've seen these plants in action, they grow into floating mats so thick, you can't even launch a boat.

That's a real problem in a state where fishing is a fundamental part of our culture, and an important contributor to our economy. Freshwater fishing generates more than $2.4 billion in retail sales across our state each year, and creates just as many memories for families in the process.

Fortunately, there are simple steps we can all take that don't cost a lot of time and money. I'd list them all, but your time would be better spent by going online and visiting texasinvasives.org, where you can learn about invasive species, including what they look like and how to report them.

Today, I will focus on the action that will have the biggest impact on the spread of giant salvinia. If you do any boating in Texas, be sure to clean off your boats, trailers and gear before moving from lake to lake. Like all great solutions, it's simple to remember and even easier to do.

I encourage all Texans to get onboard with this effort, and embrace it with the same enthusiasm you applied to “Don't Mess With Texas.” Invasive species are just more litter we don't need messing up our state, so let's work together and knock them out.

If each of us does a little, together we can do a lot.