Regional Panel Recommendations to the ANSTF

To be presented at ANSTF meeting in Arlington, VA
7 November 2007

Mid-Atlantic Regional Panel

State Management Plans

The Mid-Atlantic Panel recommends the ANSTF re-evaluate their State Management Plan guidelines and funding allocations in response to the discussions at the Spring ANSTF meeting in Erie, PA.

Prohibited Species List

The Task Force should coordinate with the regional panels to compile states' prohibited aquatic species lists to enhance prevention efforts. These lists should be posted on the Task Force website.

Listing of Federal Authorities

The Task Force should coordinate with the regional panels to compile federal authorities related to AIS that can assist states or regions with rapid response planning and implementation efforts. This compilation should be posted on the Task Force website.

Database Development (also raised at Spring 2007 meeting)

The Panel again recommends that the Task Force press for federal agency participation in the development of a comprehensive aquatic invasive species database that would ultimately allow reliable searches for aquatic invasive species temporal and spatial data in the United States. This type of a coordinated effort is fundamental to meaningful prevention, rapid response and management of aquatic invasive species in the United States.

Western Regional Panel

Agency Decontamination Protocols (also raised at Spring 2007 meeting)

It is well documented that the movement of contaminated equipment between waterbodies, including equipment used for firefighting, is a significant vector for spreading zebra mussels and other ANS. Federal, state, and regional entities and their contractors frequently move equipment between waterbodies as part of their associated activities. Without proper decontamination prior to equipment movement, ANS can be unknowingly and illegally transferred from infested waters to uninfested waters. The Western Regional Panel recommends that the ANSTF recognize this as a significant vector for the spread of ANS and encourages member agencies to require decontamination of all equipment prior to movement. Further, the Western Regional Panel requests that the ANSTF develop a document of all the member agencies decontamination policies and provide copies of the policies for local ANS managers to reference. The WRP requests that agencies with decontamination policies emphasize the policies and provide language in all permits or contracts to require decontamination. Agencies that currently do not have decontamination policies in place, should explain why policies have not been established and what is needed to institute.

Viral Hemorrhagic Septicemia Virus (also raised at Spring 2007 meeting)

A new, highly virulent and easily transmissible strain (IVb) of viral hemorrhagic septicemia virus (VHSV) has recently been detected in wild fish populations within the Great Lakes Basin. Unlike other strains of VHSV, epizootics due to this virus have been documented in a broad diversity of freshwater fish families and species. This new strain of VHSV poses a significant risk to cultured and wild fish within the Western Regional Panel area and throughout most of North America. The primary vector for transmitting the virus into the region is suspected to be the movement of live fish and fish products. Many states within the Western Regional Panel are evaluating fish transport and bait laws to help reduce the risk from that vector. States have also increased public outreach activities to increase public awareness of the issue. As a fish pathogen VHSV is not readily viewed as an Aquatic Nuisance Species by all agencies or states, additionally many states with well developed fish health programs do not involve their ANS programs or coordinators when evaluating the risks or control/prevention strategies for this pathogen. The Western Regional Panel is encouraging all member states to become familiar with this emerging pathogen and to incorporate it into their ANS programs. The Western Regional Panel requests that the ANS Task Force recognize this pathogen as an ANS and as a severe threat to the natural resources of North America, in addition to encouraging states to incorporate VHSV into their ANS Management Plans.

Great Lakes Regional Panel

State Aquatic Nuisance Species Management Plans

Recommendation: The Great Lakes Panel on Aquatic Nuisance Species recommends that the Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force, through their leadership, work to increase federal support and improve guidance for development and implementation of state management plans for aquatic nuisance species prevention and control.

Background: As an outcome of the NOAA funded, Great Lakes Commission project, *A Collaborative Approach to Advance Implementation of State Management Plans for the Prevention and Control of Aquatic Nuisance Species in the Great Lakes Region*, recommendations and suggestions were presented to the Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force (Task Force) at their joint meeting with Great Lakes Panel on Aquatic Nuisance Species (Panel) in May 2007 in Erie, Penn. A one-day session, moderated by the Panel, was held at the meeting highlighting the progress of state management planning (SMP) for aquatic nuisance species (ANS) prevention and control in the Great Lakes region. The session provided an opportunity for ANS Task Force members to engage in discussions with state and regional representatives to advance the SMP process. The first of the recommendations directed to the Task Force was two-fold:

1) **the Task Force should work with members and other partners to obtain authorization for additional funding for the regional ANS panels and to the states in support of the state management plans and**
2) **the Task Force and its members should pursue other forms of federal assistance – such as equipment, staff and technical support – to implement state-led control and response strategies.**

These recommendations were further endorsed during break-out discussions taking place at the meeting. The discussions yielded these additional suggestions:

- Revise Task Force SMP guidelines to better reflect the needs of the states, including elimination of guidelines that are no longer applicable or are restricting (e.g. allow for the submission of comprehensive aquatic and terrestrial plans, even though only the aquatic portion is eligible for Task Force funding);
- Streamline the reporting process for funding;
- Create a timeframe for distribution of federal funds;
- Provide incentives to the states for acquiring other funding; and
- Maintain an equal level of funding among the states.

Each of the regional ANS panels was asked to review the guidelines and funding strategy and submit their recommendations on revision to the Task Force. Other ideas shared during this meeting included focusing on positive outcomes to show the benefits of the SMP process and related ANS prevention and control activities to stakeholders. The need for an evaluation process was identified to help demonstrate successes and ensure funding is spent wisely. Given the limited availability of funding, a variety of creative strategies for funding SMP activities

were shared, including using a consultant to develop a long-term funding strategy and financial management plan; applying to other federal grant programs; prioritizing activities at which to direct funds; leveraging private funding sources with the aid of the regional ANS panels; and utilizing lobbying resources of the Sea Grant Network to advocate for increased appropriations. The discussion also emphasized the importance of state and federal cooperation and communication on regulatory issues. A summary of this session is available on the Great Lakes Panel website at http://glc.org/ans/panel.html#glpmeet .

Mississippi River Basin Regional Panel

Viral Hemorrhagic Septicemia Virus

The Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force (ANSTF) should recognize VHS and other pathogens as ANS and encourage states to include them in their ANS management programs. (See text of 10/29/07 letter to ANSTF co-chairs)

"On behalf of the Mississippi River Basin Panel on Aquatic Nuisance Species (MRBP), I am writing to convey to the ANS Task Force (ANSTF) the necessity to prevent Viral Hemorrhagic Septicemia (VHS), to the extent possible, from invading the Mississippi River Basin. A new, highly virulent and easily transmissible strain (IVb) of viral hemorrhagic septicemia virus (VHSv) has been spreading in wild fish populations within the Great Lakes. Unlike other strains of VHSv, epizootics due to this virus have been documented in a variety of freshwater fish species.

This strain of VHS poses a significant risk to cultured and wild fish within the Mississippi River Basin, and could be transported throughout most of North America. The primary vector for transmission is movement of live fish and fish products. Many states within the Mississippi River Basin have modified fish transportation and bait laws to help reduce the risk of spreading VHS. The United States Department of Agriculture - Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) issued a Federal Order in November 2006 which was modified May 4, 2007. The Federal Order placed restrictions on importation and interstate transportation of thirty-seven affected species of fishes to prevent movement and accidental transmission of the virus. All of the Great Lakes states, a portion of which are also in the Mississippi River Basin, were declared affected regions.

As a fish pathogen, VHSv is not readily viewed as an aquatic nuisance species (ANS) by all agencies or states. Additionally, many states with well developed fish health programs do not involve their ANS programs or coordinators when evaluating the risks or control / prevention strategies. The MRBP encourages its state members to include control of this emerging pathogen into their ANS programs. We also request the ANSTF to acknowledge this pathogen as an ANS due to its potential threat to the fisheries resources of North America.

The Invasive Species Advisory Committee (ISAC) adopted an *Invasive Species Definition Clarification and Guidance White Paper* on April 27, 2006. In that paper, ISAC defined

invasive species as those that are not native to the ecosystem under consideration and that cause or are likely to cause economic or environmental harm or harm to human, animal, or plant health. The impacts of VHSv to fish health are directly evident. This further causes a decrease in sport fishing opportunities and could negatively impact the businesses that depend upon these resources.

Fish pathogens have previously been described as ANS. For example, whirling disease is caused by a parasite (*Myxobolus cerebralis*) that most likely originated in Europe. Heavily infected young trout can die from whirling disease, and if they recover, remain carriers of the parasite. All species of trout and salmon may be susceptible, and angling and the businesses supported by trout and salmon fishing may be at risk if this disease continues to spread (Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force et al. 2005). [Online at http://protectyourwaters.net/hitchhikers/others_whirling_disease.php.]

The Western Regional Panel (WRP) presented similar requests to the ANSTF on May 8, 2007 at the ANSTF meeting in Erie, PA. The WRP requested member states to incorporate VHS management into their ANS programs and the ANSTF to recognize this pathogen as an ANS and as a severe threat to the natural resources of North America.

In summary, the MRBP joins the ISAC and WRP by encouraging all member states to incorporate VHS management into their ANS programs and requesting the ANSTF recognize VHS and other nonnative pathogens as ANS and a severe threat to the natural resources of North America."

Asian Carps

The ANSTF should approve the Management and Control Plan for Bighead, Black, Grass, and Silver Carps in the United States and immediately move forward with implementation. (See letter.)

State Management Plan Funding

The ANSTF should work with its partners to ensure that the full amount of funding authorized for state management programs is appropriated. Additionally, the minimum amount of funds granted to each state on an annual basis should support a fully dedicated, permanent ANS coordinator.

At the May 2007 meeting, the ANSTF requested that the Regional Panels develop recommendations regarding 1) existing state management plan (SMP) guidelines, 2) modifying the SMP process to improve interstate/regional cooperation, and 3) alternative SMP funding approaches. MRBP members discussed these topics at their June 2007 meeting and discovered it was difficult to reach agreement on recommendations because states are at various stages of ANS program development. Regarding SMP guidelines, MRBP members agreed that an aquatic portion of a comprehensive state invasive species management plan should be accepted by the

ANSTF. It was recognized that at the current level, there is no satisfactory method to distribute the funding. Equal distribution may seem most agreeable; however, some states cannot maintain their current programs with the decrease in funds that occurs each year as additional state plans are approved. The full amount of funding authorized for state management programs needs to be appropriated annually. That would allow each state with an approved plan to receive the minimum amount of funding annually to support a fully dedicated, permanent state ANS coordinator and a consistent ANS program. If full funding is achieved, the MRBP would recommend modifying the SMP process to support regional single-species management plans. These single-species plans would only be considered for funding after each state receives their allocation.

Commercial Harvest Guidelines

The ANSTF should encourage agencies to incorporate commercial harvest guidelines while developing tools to manage and control ANS. (See guidelines below)

Panel Funding Guidelines

Last but not least, the ANSTF should ask the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to provide a document to the Regional Panels on the elements that need to be submitted with grant requests to receive Panel funds.

The Regional Panels have different administrative and operating structures, and the scopes of work and supporting documentation submitted for their annual funding requests are not uniform. The current system seems to work in most cases; however, written guidance provided to the Regional Panels by the USFWS would improve the understanding by Regional Panel coordinators and chairs of the elements required for grant approval. The guidance would be especially beneficial when Panel leadership changes.

Guidelines for Developing Commercial Harvest Policy for Aquatic Invasive Species

Mississippi River Basin Panel on Aquatic Nuisance Species

An invasive species means an alien species whose introduction does or is likely to cause economic or environmental harm or harm to human health.[i] Aquatic invasive species (AIS) that have invaded, or may yet invade, the Mississippi River Basin could have commercial or recreational value. While this creates financial opportunities, it could result in serious problems if the potential value of the species provides a stimulus for people to expand the range of those species. This is also true if fishery policies inadvertently foster a more rapid or extensive distribution of AIS.

The Mississippi River Basin Panel (MRBP) consists of members representing 9 federal agencies, 26 states/provinces, 7 regional entities, 2 environmental/user groups, 4 private/commercial groups, 2 university/research institutions and 2 at large stakeholders, for a total of 52 members from within the 32-state Mississippi River Basin. With such a diverse group, a common set of management principles is essential for establishing a strategy to guide efforts to control introduction and spread of AIS within the basin.

Below are a set of principles that are offered for guidance in developing policies for commercial harvest of AIS. Each jurisdiction must give careful consideration to how local regulations may help foster an effective basin-wide approach to managing commercial fisheries for AIS.

1. **Kill aquatic invasive species immediately upon harvest**. All harvested aquatic invasive species should be immediately killed to reduce the risk of transport and introduction beyond their current range.

2. **Identify aquatic invasive species and label appropriately**. Either all harvested aquatic invasive species, or an appropriate subset of containers in which they are stored, should be identified (genus and species) and labeled appropriately. Misidentified organisms and mislabeled containers should trigger enforcement actions.

3. **Require data submission.** Harvesters should be required to submit detailed reports which can be reviewed and collated to track critical species information. Falsification of these reports should be dealt with by enforcement action.

4. **Regulate harvest locations and seasons.** The potential harvest of aquatic invasive species may result in increased harvest effort, which may adversely affect native species. Harvest locations and open seasons should be regulated to minimize negative impacts on native species.

5. **Require cleaning or disinfection.** Harvesters should ensure that transportation of equipment does not result in further spread of aquatic invasive species.

6. **Maintain flexibility.** Policies should be formulated that facilitate rapid change through use of experimental fisheries, temporary rules, sunset provisions, etc. Policies should be reviewed often, and adjusted as new technologies or data become available.

7. **Openly communicate objectives.** Resource agencies should clearly state their goals and objectives for allowing harvest and/or use of a particular aquatic invasive species (e.g., commercial harvest as part of an individual species control program). Government agencies should be careful not to create expectations that are unsustainable. Likewise, investors must not overcapitalize an industry in which depletion of the raw materials is a primary objective. Exit strategies should be created while developing any harvest plan, and alternate sources of raw materials should be anticipated.

---

[i] Executive Order 13112, signed on February 3, 1999.

MRBP
the MISSISSIPPI RIVER BASIN PANEL
on AQUATIC NUISANCE SPECIES