

The ANS Hotline (877-STOP-ANS)

Fall 2014 ANSTF Meeting, Falls Church, VA

Background

- Spring 2010 ANSTF Meeting
 - David Britton, FWS Regional AIS Coordinator for the Southwest Region gave update on the ANS Hotline
 - Some issues of concern were identified
- Early 2014
 - FWS asked to look at the hotline and its status
 - Reviewed full history and use of the hotline

History

- 1998 – MOU Between USGS and USFWS
 - To document species sightings (for ED/RR) and help develop the USGS NAS database
 - Originally just an answering machine at USGS
- 2007 – Management of Hotline Transferred to FWS
 - USFWS staff became primary call responders
 - Hotline redirected to a live call center, staffed 24/7/365

How It Works

- A person calls **877-STOP-ANS**
- A live call-center agent answers and records pertinent information
- A recording of the call is immediately forwarded to USFWS/USGS biologists
 - Calls are received on mobile internet devices
- Biologists either contact the original caller or notify the proper authorities
 - Entered into USGS NAS database once verified.

Issues

- Call center agents are not biologists
- Call centers do not triage calls
- Limited number of “on-call” USFWS/USGS staff to receive calls
- **Low call activity**
- **Calls often received for other purposes besides reporting species**

Call Activity

- Typically receive only 5 calls per month
 - Sometimes as low as 2-3/month
 - Highest call volume has been 25-30/month
- Not used by all states – many states have their own reporting methods
 - More than 12 states have their own hotlines
 - More are considering getting their own as well
 - Many states have online reporting methods
 - Many states direct calls to their DNR office or State AIS Coordinators

Reasons for Calling

- To reach their state wildlife or parks agency
- To ask questions
- To request brochures
- To lodge complaints
- To request help for eradicating a species
- To report an unusual or invasive species
 - And even when they do call to report a species, it often ends up being a native species or an invasive species we already knew about

Is the Hotline Still Needed?

- So we have a hotline that
 - Could be set up more efficiently than it is now
 - Isn't used very frequently
 - Even when it is used, isn't used for its intended purpose
 - And even when it is, doesn't usually result in an "early detection"
- Ultimately, after 15 years, the ANS Hotline has not received any calls that have resulted in an important early detection or led to a successful rapid response
 - But it has helped USGS add data to the NAS Database

NAS Alert System

- A component of the USGS NAS Database
- An online system to help track the spread of AIS nationwide
- Two parts
 - Online reporting
 - Alert system

NAS Online Reporting

- Allows users to report nonindigenous and invasive aquatic species they encounter
- Online web form:
<http://nas.er.usgs.gov/SightingReport.aspx>
- Allows users to submit biologic, geographic (GPS), contact information, and voucher photos
- Upon submission, the information is sent to USGS NAS staff experts
- After evaluation and verification, the sighting information is added to the NAS Database

NAS Alert System

- Allows users to receive e-mail alerts about AIS
- Users can sign up for
 - State Watches
 - Group Watches – Taxonomic groups
 - Species Watches
- Before an alert is sent out, the information is checked against the NAS Database to make sure it is a new location.

A Viable Alternative for the ANS Hotline?

- So we have a hotline that hasn't completely fulfilled its purpose
- And an ever increasing use of smartphones
 - And a corresponding availability of cameras
- And a citizenry that is always connected
- And an existing reporting and alert system
 - that anyone can use
 - And can be configured both geographically or by species or species groups.

Our Proposal

- Phase-Out of the ANS Hotline in favor of promotion of the NAS Alert System
- Cons
 - Loss of the hotline which is still used by some
 - Which will render some current outreach materials invalid
 - Will need to develop **a phase-out plan**
- Pros
 - Conversion to an alert system which is already in use and tied directly to the NAS Database
 - Allows for greater incorporation of technologies
 - Photos, GPS Coordinates
 - Users can set up specific alerts based on their interests

Conceptual Phase-Out Plan

- Plan to keep stop using the ANS Hotline at a specific time
- Heavily advertise our intentions
 - Regional Panel Meetings
 - NISC and ISAC Meetings
 - E-mails to all State Contacts
 - Outreach materials
- Put up a recorded message on ANS Hotline number that directs callers to the NAS alert system
 - Add links from the NAS page to other information

Phase-Out Support

- Our conclusion that the best course of action is to phase-out the ANS Hotline and put our support behind the NAS Alert System was not conducted in a vacuum, we consulted with:
 - All 7 of the USFWS Regional AIS Coordinators
 - USGS
 - Pam Fuller
 - Amy Benson
 - Steve Phillips, PSMFC

ANSTF Approval?

- Despite the ANS Hotline being a Service project, we didn't want to make this decision by ourselves
- We wanted to come before the Task Force, let you know what we were thinking and get your approval.