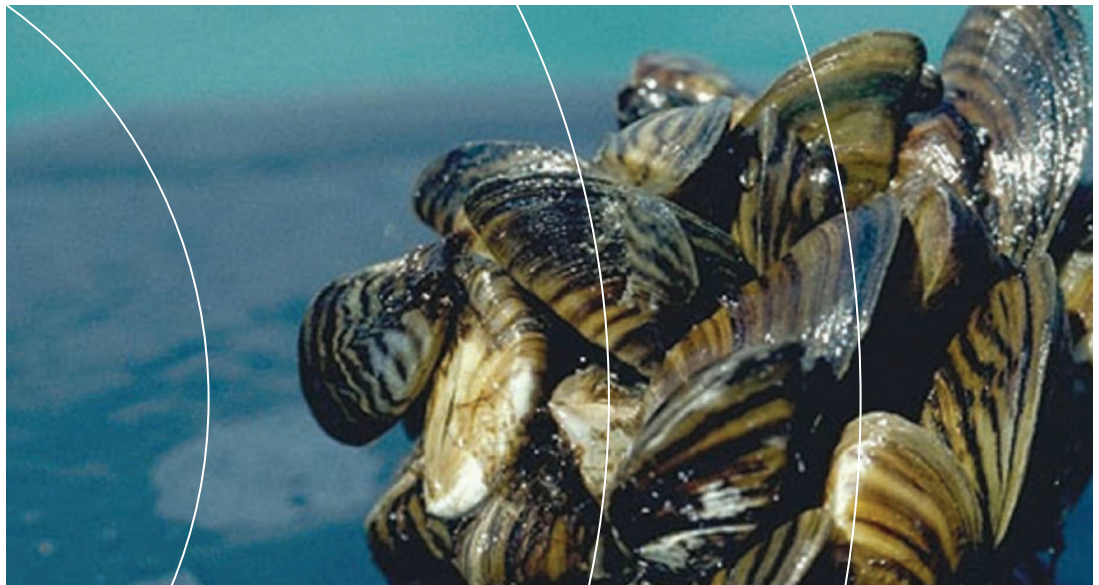




Aquatic
Invasive
Species



MGA
Aquatic
Invasive
Species
Policy Maker
Summary
2013

Midwest Governors Association Aquatic Invasive Species Policy Maker Summary

Background

As the 2013 Chair of the Midwestern Governors Association (MGA), Minnesota Governor Mark Dayton chose the issue of invasive species as his agenda for the year. In particular, Governor Dayton wanted to bring Midwestern states together to discuss and collaborate on combating aquatic invasive species (AIS).

Every year invasive species cause huge economic losses and dramatic ecological changes. The National Invasive Species Information Center estimated that these pests, at the low end, cause \$138 billion annually in damages and reduced production. Given the central importance of the agricultural sector, the sportfishing industry (for locals and tourists alike), commercial fisheries and aquaculture, expansive forestlands and vast rural areas, invasive species are an extreme threat to the Midwestern way of life.

On June 27 and 28, 2013, representatives of governors' offices and natural resource agencies from across the region came together at an Aquatic Invasive Species Policy Maker Summit to share ideas and best practices. The attendees came up with a set of concrete actions to take together as a region to advance their individual and collective abilities to address the threat of AIS. The following pages highlight the outcomes of the Summit with a focus on future action.

Meeting Themes

- ***The importance of leadership, at the state and federal level, to demonstrate to the public that the issue of aquatic invasive species is a priority.***

One of the most powerful things governors can do to elevate the importance of the AIS challenge is to make it clear to their own agencies, the public and the federal government that they see the issue as a priority for action, policy and spending. At the federal level, visible and coordinated leadership is crucial to sustaining broad public interest and developing the tools necessary to take action on the issue of AIS at the true scale of the problem.

- ***The need to set consistent metrics for success and to find ways to measure it.***

Given the scale and complexity of the problem, it can be difficult to define what it would mean to be "successful" as managers working to address invasive species. In many cases it is unrealistic to think that species can be completely eradicated, or that it would be possible to completely stop the introduction of new species. In addition, as managers, it is critical to define benchmarks for progress, whether in terms of behavior change or in reduced rates of spread of priority species.¹

¹ Species that have been identified as priorities to control due to their especially high potential to cause ecological, economic, social, or cultural harm, as well as other criteria such as proximity of threat and ease of prevention.

- ***The importance of utilizing the existing management and coordination infrastructure, including state programs and regional panels—but with national coordination.***

States, in conjunction with both federal and nonprofit partners, such as the Mississippi Interstate Cooperative Resource Association (MICRA) and the Upper Mississippi River Basin Association (UMBRA), have built considerable expertise and coordination abilities to address AIS, particularly through the Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force regional panels. Further work should utilize this infrastructure and existing relationships. There should be a clear and streamlined role for the federal government as a coordinator across states and regions, without creating redundant systems or structures.

- ***The value of coordinated message development and use.***

States (and federal agencies) have been experimenting with public messaging and outreach on the issue of AIS for many decades and have learned a tremendous amount about effectively reaching different demographics and audiences. There is no reason to reinvent the wheel. States across the region can, and to an extent already do, work together to learn from each other's efforts to refine messaging, and to develop joint marketing campaigns, in order to be both more efficient and effective in their public outreach.

- ***The benefits of aligning policies and identifying common priority species and pathways of introduction.***

Across the region, states currently exhibit a broad array of statutes and regulations related to preventing the introduction and spread of AIS, including their lists of regulated and banned species. Greater alignment of these policies, particularly amongst neighboring states, as well as a unified list of priority "bad actor" species (as has been created for the Great Lakes) could make state-level enforcement easier and more effective.

- ***The need for more research—both biological/ecological and on behavior change.***

To successfully address AIS, more information is needed on priority species, including how to detect and control local populations. When addressing different vectors (i.e. pathways) of species introduction and movement, more information is needed on what policies, messages, and delivery methods are most effective in changing public behavior.

Consensus Ideas for Action – Designate Lead Federal Agency

- Designate the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) as the single federal lead on invasive species. A lead agency would help to:
 - Create a unified vision, strategy, priorities, measures of success, etc. and to give states a clear focal point for engagement and accountability.
 - Prioritize, coordinate and leverage federal funding from other agencies to combat aquatic invasive species (for both research and management).
 - Strengthen international screening and prevention of new species from entering the country through national leadership and coordination.
 - Coordinate research through state universities and federal agencies.
 - Develop and coordinate messaging based on proven impact, as well as to disseminate best practices.
 - Provide improved federal leadership through utilization and bolstering of the effectiveness of existing coordination infrastructure and state management plans.

State Specific Actions:

- Request that the Midwestern governors publicly express their support for making AIS a priority through a joint declaration that would:
 - Ask all state agencies to institute best practices and lead by example.
 - Ask commissioners/secretaries of natural resource agencies to convene to discuss policy alignment and priorities (including vectors and species), as well as to develop joint rapid response plans and approaches.
 - Commit to the state-level actions needed to implement the national carp management plan.
 - Express support for coordinated messaging between states within the region.
- Develop a joint PSA featuring the governors or a single high-profile messenger.
- Governors and/or high-level staff attend National Invasive Species Awareness Week events in Washington, DC in March of 2014.