

Midwestern Governors Association Aquatic Invasive Species Policy Maker Summit

Meeting Notes

6/27/13

Introductions

Kate Wolford, president of The McKnight Foundation, and Tom Landwehr, commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, opened the meeting with a welcome on behalf of our hosts for the two-day summit, the McKnight Foundation and the state of Minnesota respectively.

After the conclusion of formal introductions, **Paul Aasen, city coordinator for the City of Minneapolis** and the facilitator of the summit, gave a brief presentation framing the issue of invasive species with a little bit of history, followed by some goals and parameters for the conversation.

Federal Agency Presentations

John Goss, Asian Carp Director, White House Council on Environmental Quality & Chair, Asian Carp Regional Coordinating Committee kicked off the first panel:

- Asian carp are currently a poster child for AIS
- There are a number of things happening at the national and regional scale:
 - New Coast Guard mandatory ballast water rules are now being put into place.
 - The binational Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement was recently updated to include new AIS provisions.
 - The Great Lakes-Mississippi River Interbasin Study (GLMRIS), looking at options for protecting the two basins, will soon be completed.
 - There is a handout with information about the president's budget proposals related to invasive species, including an increase for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and a smaller increase for U.S. Geological Survey (USGS). Please share this handout with your state liaisons in Washington.
- At the same time, we cannot just keep saying, "We will wait for the feds to do something." Because of this, state folks (the participants in this summit) are working on ways to get ahead of the issue.
- There is great work happening though the Mississippi Interstate Cooperative Resource Association (MICRA) and the Mississippi River Basin Panel on Aquatic Nuisance Species (hosted by MICRA since 2003 under the oversight of the national Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force).
- We need to get better at communication at all levels—this is one of the opportunities to do that.

Mike Jawson, Director, Upper Midwest Environmental Science Center, U.S. Geological Survey spoke next:

- We [the USGS] have no management responsibility, but focus on providing information and tools to managers (at the state and federal level) to help managers working on the ground do a better job.
- The expertise we have on this issue is not concentrated in one place. We have tried to put together the best team across USGS we can on this issue, working with states and others.
- States provide a lot of the infrastructure we need to test and develop new control measures, so we cannot do our research without their support.
- We're interested in is early detection, primarily by testing for eDNA. We are working to make that procedure faster, cheaper, and more reliable, and to better understand what a positive test means. We are also looking at microbial source tracking.
- We are working on risk assessment and analysis.
- The bulk of our effort now is on control and deterrent methods. We recognize that once you control a species you may have a changed ecosystem (new species come in to fill the niche(s), not the original natives), and are also studying the restoration needed after control occurs.
- We rely on FWS in their role as a management agency to be a strong partner, and provide support by being, for example, the registrant with the EPA of the control agent.
- We also work with some NGOs (e.g. River Alliance) as important partners. They are important for helping to disseminate information to the public and advocating in ways that government agencies cannot.
- I am interested in for feedback from states on how we can improve our relationships and support each other.

Questions and discussion:

- How quickly might we get to the point that we have a solution for addressing zebra mussels?
 - It depends on how much we need to test for effects on non-target organisms.
 - We are learning from and building on past experiences (e.g. sea lamprey)
 - Early results are promising, but it is probably three to five years out before we will be using Zequanox as a management tool.
 - It will also depend on how much management agencies and other groups (e.g., lake associations) can afford.
 - It may never be realistic to think that we will have something that could be feasibly used for broad application.
- USGS is also looking at habitat needs and how that impacts invasions.
- Interacting and communicating with private groups (NGOs) is important.
- In terms of funding, yes, we could do more work with more funding within limits related to existing research and implementation infrastructure. The problem is so big, it's tough to put number on it, but we could easily and effectively spend much more than we have now.
- We have to do better with risk analysis:
 - This can help us focus our efforts on the species that have the potential to do the most harm (the nuisance axis), not everything that is "invasive." Only a

small percentage of AIS cause serious harm, and we should be doing risk analysis on the likelihood of different species harming ecosystems of concern.

- When you bring the risk and impacts together you can narrow down to fewer species of particular concern and focus efforts, which is helpful from a policy-maker perspective when we are dealing with limited resources.
 - Many believe that invasive species don't have as big of a chance of doing harm in a robust environment, so we should look at the robustness of the existing ecosystem as a factor in risk assessments and explore restoring habitat as a means of controlling or keeping invasive species from causing undue harm.
 - Another reason that risk assessment is very important is that it is cheaper than prevention.
 - It would be good to have some guidance as managers on what their standards are in terms of risk assessment.
- Now is the time to be working on prevention of northern snakehead, rather than control (Arkansas has had experience with this that we can learn from).
 - If you're talking about prevention, it would be helpful to get away from a species-by-species approach to more of a vectors approach.
 - One thing we learned from the sea lamprey experience is that it is a continuous battle. You cannot back off—you have to maintain a constant level of vigilance and effort. You can't eradicate some invasive species—only keep them in check.

Charlie Wooley Deputy Regional Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Region 3, rounded out the panel:

- We come in when asked but respect the rights of states to manage their resources.
 - Generally, we coordinate among partners on AIS issues and can help coordinate response activities by states.
- We also co-chair the Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force (ANSTC) at the national level.
- FWS has conducted many risk assessments, including 2,000 non-native species studies
- In recent years there has been a lot of money just focused on the Great Lakes, but that is shifting and we will soon be able to do more work (on carp specifically) in the Upper Mississippi River Basin and Ohio River with the addition of \$1.5 million in base funding for FY2014 (this would bring the FWS total up to \$5.9 million in the president's budget).
- The Great Lakes governors have identified a "least wanted" list of species, which is helpful.
- Ten years ago we started working with the Canadians to ensure that the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement includes key AIS provisions, and last year those provisions were added.
- We have identified "bad actor" species in East Asia and Europe that will cause the same kinds of problems as silver carp, so we want to keep them out.
 - We can use provisions under the Lacey Act, but it is badly in need of an update
- We now have a state-of-the-art research and testing facility, including an eDNA lab, in the upper Midwest (in LaCrosse, WI).

- Army Corps of Engineers staff from Mississippi (where they have an older facility) helped to set the lab up, so we've drawn in a lot of expertise.
- We have confidence in our ability to advance eDNA testing technology with the help of our partners.
- We also now have a real plan for combating Asian carp and will have the money to actually implement it.
 - We will only spend this money in your states at the request of the states through the fish chiefs and at the approval of DNR heads.
 - The bill proposed by Betty McCollum would provide official authorization, but the appropriation is still critical in order to make good on our plans and promises and support state partners.
 - It's good to have money in our back pocket in case we need to use it for assessment or management/control activities.
 - The plan (Management and Control Plan for Bighead, Black, Grass, and Silver Carps in the United States) really represents a collaborative effort amongst states and others and FWS is here to continue to coordinate the implementation effort.

Questions and discussion:

- What are the options that might involve repurposing some existing funds that are coming into the region so that we're not just asking for more? Many of the Midwestern governors are very concerned about not asking for things that ultimately increase our national deficit.
 - It would be very difficult to do this with most of the items currently in the federal budget, but might be possible in some cases at the state level.
- Another important aspect of funding is taking a national approach, rather than doling out funds in a piecemeal way from basin to basin or agency to agency.
- If we don't have the support of the governors this issue won't really get addressed.
- What about a "white list" approach that puts the burden of risk assessment onto the people who want to bring new species into the country or into a new state or ecosystem?
 - There is federal legislation that has been introduced in the House that would allow the USFWS to declare imported live animals as "injurious" species and either prohibit them from import or strictly regulate them (the Invasive Fish and Wildlife Prevention Act).
 - This might be gaining some momentum.
 - The burden should be on industry to show that species introduced won't be invasive if released. Where is industry on this issue?
 - In some cases the pet industry, etc. is working as a strong partner.
 - The boat and trailer industry is another one that we need to be working with.

State Programs Presentations

After a break, the group returned for a second round of presentations and discussion focused on the different approaches, recent successes, and challenges faced by different state programs.

Jason Goeckler (KS), Aquatic Nuisance Species Specialist, Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks

- Started building a culture around stopping the spread of ANS, but first drafted a plan in 2005. At the time we had one temporary employee, with no additional funding for the project.
- The major task of the coordinator was to find money for their own job and any program resources. We got some resources from fish and game clubs and most funding actually came from the state utilities.
- From 2005 to 2010 there was a small ANSTF grant to supplement the utility funding and other small funding sources.
- We now have one full-time coordinator with one part-time employee working for them.
- The budget now is about \$25k from ANSTF and \$250k from state license fees (wildlife handling fees), plus in-kind support from other agencies.
- We find it helpful to support neighbors in the work that they are doing because we only get new invasives when there is a failure somewhere else (with no ports or entry points ourselves).
- How do you get it beyond just a fisheries issue with a program funded only by anglers?
 - One way we've tried to do this is to by funding work on economic analysis to make this issue relevant for more citizens.
 - We've also tried to be strategic about management plans to bring in science, health, and economics in a holistic way.
- It's very hard to define success and show what is a good investment. This is still a developing field, and we don't have the answers that other fields have.
 - If we don't have the science we won't get the money.
 - If we don't have the success stories we won't get the money.
- We have turned our attention to vectors (rather than species), which is what helps as a manager.
 - The bait trade is the big vector we took on several years ago. Bait sellers were selling illegal species at bait shops and people were using Asian carp as bait.
 - We started with a human dimensions study (asking how anglers get their bait, what they use, etc.) and then did a risk assessment. Lot of people were buying bait, and those who weren't buying it were still moving bait.
 - We invested a lot as an agency to address this, but are finding that we're having success. We had some outcry from the public at first, but it helped to have a solid strategy and information to back up the program.
 - You have to educate legislators and elected officials—have fact sheets ready. We took legislators on a tour and showed them Asian carp and had them try to identify the carp vs. the native species. They found it surprisingly difficult, and after that the policy-makers were totally on board.
- We have had trouble passing policy restricting movement of species at the state-wide level, but have been successful in getting ordinances in place at the local (county) level instead.

**Kevin Irons, Program Manager, Aquaculture & Aquatic Nuisance Species Program,
Illinois Department of Natural Resources**

- Our program is basically an army of one and only \$25,000 of Fish & Wildlife funds.
- The ANS portion of the GLRI has provided important funding for activities as well (in the order of \$.5 million).
 - It will be a significant challenge when this funding goes away.
- In Illinois we employ a “white list” approach whereby we define the species that are permissible for possession and trade within the state, and all others have to have gain explicit approval.
- Addition of an injurious species list to the existing white list system (with more penalties) lets us go into more places and address the worst of the worst.
- Our ability to communicate with the public is well beyond what would have seemed possible 10 years ago.
 - We have an unprecedented level of communications between our various partners.
 - We are in the process of developing a program based on “Stop Aquatic Hitchhikers” (known as “Be a Hero, Transport Zero”)
 - We have partnered with Minnesota and other states on developing and aligning messaging and joint education/marketing campaigns.
- The commercial fishing industry will be a big part of the solution.
- The Viral Hemorrhagic Septicemia (VHS) rule (2005) is the best rule we have in Illinois and has been a critical tool for us as well. It prevents moving water between water bodies (requires draining boats).
- We are doing a lot of work to address zebra mussels as well. We are trying to be able to react to new outbreaks by stocking chemicals.
- We are developing rapid response plans for hydrilla and species that aren’t yet in the state.
 - We have a “hydrilla gorilla” campaign to have people go out and identify the plant.
- It has been a huge success and was surprisingly easy to develop the list of “least wanted” species for the Great Lakes states.
- We are looking at dedicating some new funds to AIS through license fees.
- We are trying to align policies with the Ohio basin folks, and we should do that throughout the region.
 - Grass carp is an example of a species where we need to align policy.
 - We have also borrowed a lot of Indiana’s approaches
- We have been working on commercializing carp meat, and specifically getting it into food pantries where the need for low-cost, high-value protein is so high. Something processed (like carp hot dogs) is likely to be the most viable way to do this.
- It can be easier to make the case for carp as opposed to small invasive because carp are so visible and people see and experience them in the real world.

Questions and discussion:

- What are some of the lessons learned from Illinois’s work with the commercial fishing industry related to public-private partnerships?

- People are willing to do a lot of things but want to be paid to do it. We're trying to let industry make their own cohesive plan instead of throwing money at companies who try and get boats, etc. subsidized.
- How do you fund this? And what is the exit strategy? What happens when we do get carp under control? Do we ask them to move on to other species?
- Illinois is making progress on the percentage of people who know about carp, so we should make sure that we're learning from each other and not recreating the wheel. What are best practices? What are the right messages? If we are successful on messaging that makes the funding side a lot easier.
- Voter education can lead to bigger things. Voters in Iowa decided to raise fees on themselves, half of which get used for AIS (the other half are used for navigational safety).
- You have to be careful asking the right questions.
- At the federal level, FWS's messaging and communications program was stripped out of the budget, so we've lost that layer of coordination and support.

Ann Pierce, Invasive Species Program Coordinator, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

- Minnesota's invasive species program works on both aquatic and terrestrial species and focuses on providing education, research and management support to the DNR and partners. We started in 1987 with purple loosestrife, then moved to Eurasian milfoil.
- We have been working on biological controls, but this can be slow going (e.g. we have been working on garlic mustard for 11 years and still don't have approval). Loosestrife is a species where bio-control has been very effective.
- A major focus of our work is an extensive inspection program, which is enforceable.
 - We also utilize a lot of volunteer inspectors (they can't enforce, but can help educate and cover more waterways than we can have staff inspectors at).
 - We studied what it would cost to inspect every boat every time it is launched, and it ranged from \$28 million to \$600 million, which we know isn't realistic.
 - We take the data from the inspectors to learn what needs to be tweaked about the regulations.
- This year we have about \$400k in GLRI funding, which is a huge help. We also have some general fund money and an invasive species account, which is funded from fees (e.g. boat licenses), out-of-state surcharges (e.g. out-of-state fishing licenses), and (in the past) some legislative and lottery money.
- We just started a pilot project with zebra mussel-sniffing dogs, which are much more efficient and effective than human inspectors (about 15X faster). We are thinking of using them at fishing tournaments and at roadside checks. It also helps with public engagement—people connect with the cute dogs and it draws more positive attention.
- We recently convened a 15-member advisory group made up of stakeholders (plus five ex-officio members from other agencies and the University of Minnesota).

Cooperation and collaboration:

- Some of our staff members took a trip to Colorado to learn about what they are doing in their program and adopted a lot of ideas from them.

- The ANSTC regional basin panels have been very important in communicating across jurisdictions.
- We have partnered a lot with other states and agencies on public awareness campaigns, PSAs, messaging, etc.

Gaps and needs:

- How do we maintain focus on such a long-term issue? We have had some of these invasive for 100 years already.
- Another gap is the synergistic impact that climate change is going to have on some of these species. Our risk assessments need to incorporate this issue and we need to think about what is really going to happen in the future (that may be different from current conditions) when we make management decisions.
- It would be useful to see some consistency across regulations and prohibited species throughout the region. Some states allow for grass carp, etc.
- It would also be helpful to do some sharing around what is working in terms of communicating with the public. What makes people listen?

Questions and discussion:

- How has inspection and enforcement been targeted?
 - Right now the focus is preventing the spread to un-infested lakes. One way to do this is to focus inspections on lakes that are heavily infested and make sure that people don't leave with them.
 - The second-tier screen is whether a water body is high-use.
 - We are also working with tribes, cities, counties, park districts, and private owners of access points to get to water bodies that we don't have access to.
- It would help if there were a clear process that laid out the expectations in terms of risk assessment of impacts of control measures on non-target species.
 - Also, these assessments should look at the risk of doing nothing and at the benefits—currently they don't really incorporate these elements.

Chris Vitello, Fisheries Division Chief, Missouri Department of Conservation

- We have a full-time coordinator who chairs a commission, but a lot more people are working on the issue than just the person who has it as a full-time job assignment.
- We currently have response plans for carp, zebra mussels, hydrilla and didymo (rock snot).
- We have also developed biosecurity plans for each of our hatchery facilities (they instruct staff in the use of BMPs to ensure biosecurity, avoid the introduction or vectoring of invasives and limit/control fish health issues. We also use the Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) process to establish procedures for hatchery and field staff to use to avoid/minimize the Department's potential role as an invasive vector.
- We have identified the state itself (state departments and employees) as a potential vector, as we move equipment around more than anyone else, so we started by really educating state staff. This also helps when we go out and talk to the public about these issues, since we can make it clear that we are walking the talk.
- We work closely with partners (Army Corps, private reservoir managers, etc.).

- We have found it easier to sell the positives associated with addressing AIS (more, bigger, better fish) than the negatives (this bad thing will happen if you do this thing).
- We are moving to a dual list system with both a prohibited species list and an approved species list.
- Tilapia is one species that people are really interested in—everyone wants to raise them, but you need special permission and it is highly regulated, so we are doing a lot of work on that issue.
- We are also working on crayfish regulations.
- We didn't necessarily do enough homework before putting regulations in place around the bait and aquaculture industries, so we have had to go back and do a lot of work over the two years to gather input and build consensus.
- We have banned felt-soled (and all porous-soled) waders, which were a major vector for a few key species. The public was very supportive of this policy.
- There is never enough funding and staff to go around.
- We are working on putting economic incentives in place, and always on public awareness.
- Something we should be really aware of is genetically modified species, and we are looking to tighten up our regulations in that area. So far we have just seen the tip of iceberg.

Questions and discussion:

- State agencies leading by example is really important. Nothing upsets the public more than having a governor or agency tell them to do something that the government is not doing itself.

Bob Wakeman, Wisconsin Aquatic Invasive Species Coordinator, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

- I **am** the program, but we rely a great deal on volunteers, county programs, and others to get the work done.
- The program is housed within the DNT lakes and rivers section.
- As scientists we don't always know the best way to talk to people, so we also have a strong relationship with the university extension program where they do.
- In terms of funding, ours was conceived in the late 80s and early 90s when lakeside property owners came to the DNR to ask for support on this issue and a special gas tax was instituted—we get about \$4.5 million of that and the rest goes to other water programs.
- Most of the state funding (\$4 million) gets given back to lake management districts, units of local government, and nonprofits through AIS grants. The rest of the money is for program administration, including a citizen volunteer lake-monitoring program.
- Our science-based outreach program has had a huge impact on awareness.
 - We are working with a statistician (funded by GLRI) on a monitoring program so that we know whether we're successful.
 - We gave out ice packs with information, both to discourage moving water between lakes in coolers and because it is a way for anglers to have our messages

with them in the boat. We'll go back to test whether they are using them instead of transporting water next year.

- The main question is the relationship between awareness and compliance.
- If spread of AIS is flat or going down we are doing okay, but if it is going up we need to change our message or do something different.
- We are in the process of developing a tri-state PSA with Minnesota and Michigan showing iconic fishing locations with a unified message about protecting them from AIS.
 - We need to look more for those kinds of opportunities (regionalization), including shared staff (we are looking at trying this with Illinois), as well as messages.
- Single oversight of the issue would be helpful—it feels like there isn't anyone really in charge. We need a federal agency that steers and coordinates things, and FWS seems like the right fit.
- We need to be thinking about efficient and sustainable funding—sustaining the effort is key. This issue isn't going to go away. How do we ramp up to a point that's sustainable, that will be there for the long haul?
- We are still collecting information on the public's reaction and reception to decontamination facilities
- A recent study by the University of Wisconsin looked at AIS in lakes with public access compared to “wild lakes” (lakes without a public access point) and found pretty much nothing in the wild lakes, even if there was some shoreline development, so the DNR is only monitoring lakes with public access.

Questions and discussion:

- So what is the best messaging? This is an area where we can really learn from each other and not reinvent the wheel.
 - The panels are a great vehicle for sharing information about messaging.
- How do you incorporate volunteers and so many pass-through grants into your program? What boundaries do you put on what people can do?
 - The volunteers don't have authority to deny access to waterways, but they can enforce AIS introduction laws through ticketing.
 - There is a ranking system for the grants, so if you go too far outside of what we're looking for in our overall strategy you won't get points and probably won't be funded.
- In Iowa there was a user-driven effort and boaters raised their own fees, with half of the money dedicated to the AIS.
- One of the quickest ways of losing the public's support is telling them to do one thing and then not doing a good job of it ourselves.
- Developing some performance-based metrics (rather than activity-based metrics) and measuring those would really help to tell the right story. But these long-term monitoring efforts take a lot of money and are hard to sustain.
- In some states we are struggling with how to measure success. Zebra mussels are still being spread through water movement, and the program is to stop movement by humans, so how do you factor that natural spread into your story about the impact of the program?

Group Discussion: What Would It Take to Solve the Problem of AIS?

In order to stimulate a big-picture discussion of what options might be available to control and eradicate invasive species if we were not constrained by personal definitions of what is “feasible” (economically, politically, etc.), **Paul Aasen** asked the group to fill in the blanks in the sentence below with anything that they could think of.

If we are really serious about _____ we will _____.

- 1) If we are serious about measuring success...
- 2) If we are serious about proving that there is a reason to care about the native/non-native discussion...
- 3) If we are really serious about not having an AIS problem, we will be looking prevention at a national level.
- 4) If we serious about regionalizing this effort...
- 5) If we serious about sustaining this effort... Right now we are ramping up in interest and funding, but can we sustain this effort?
- 6) If we are serious about prioritizing finite resources...
- 7) If we are serious about creating a bad actors list...
- 8) If we are serious about implementing controls...
- 9) If we are serious about reducing impacts of AIS...
- 10) If we are serious about creating single federal lead...
- 11) If we are serious about addressing gaps in policy across state boundaries...
- 12) If we are serious about creating complementary regulatory policy...
- 13) If we are serious about creating a regional white list...
- 14) If we are serious about leading by example for the control of AIS...
- 15) If we are serious about managing vectors and the human dimension of AIS transport...
- 16) If we are serious about meeting the expectations of the public (consumers) for AIS control...
- 17) If we are serious about creating a catalog of best practices/optimizing what we know...
- 18) If we are serious about getting more funding into the upper-Midwest/Mississippi basin... In other words, how to we match what has happened in the Great Lakes?
- 19) If we are serious about improving our messaging... Are we measuring the right things and are we communicating how important this is?
- 20) If we are serious about educating the public correctly...
- 21) If we are serious about keeping everyone’s attention...
- 22) If we are serious about getting noticed by the public...
- 23) If we are serious about improving detection of AIS...
- 24) If we are serious about ongoing conversation... What are the specific mechanisms to foster that conversation?
- 25) If we are serious about bringing continued, good-value science into the AIS conversation...
- 26) If we are serious about restricting recreational navigation...
- 27) If we are serious about closing Lock and Dam No. 1...
- 28) If we are serious about not trading one invasive species for another (filling the cleared ecological niche)...
- 29) If we are serious about doing something in one year...

This list was taken home by summit staff to be grouped and reorganized into a list of potential topics for discussion on coordination and collaboration activities the following day.

6/28/13

Deep Dive on Specific Opportunities for MGA Member State Collaboration

Paul Aasen started the day by presenting the staff group's attempt to group and organize the potential discussion topics for the morning. He opened up the discussion with the state participants by asking people to identify their priorities from amongst the list.

It was suggested that "regionalization" might be a good focus for this group and would make sense as a topic for deeper discussion. Also, measuring success could fit well within this topic.

It was also noted that having a single lead federal agency would be very helpful and is compatible with regional collaboration.

A regional PSA that all of the governors participate in would be something very concrete that could come out of the meeting.

The group agreed to start with the topic of regional coordination, and specifically the idea of a regional banned species list:

- What is the list intended to be used for?
- What are the key gaps?
- How can this help with rapid response?
- We need to make sure that the process for creating new regulations in each state doesn't slow us down. In the near term we can still create a hit list of worst actors for the region (or nation).

It is important that we have some concrete actions that can be accomplished with the MGA's leadership, probably within the year.

We can have a report that gives ideas for action, some of which are things that the governor's can do, some of which might be things that we take on within our individual states, some of which might be taken up by UMRBA or the Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCCs) or the ANSTF panels.

- There was extensive conversation about the degree to which the panels and other groups could be an appropriate vehicle to continue this work and any action items that come out of the MGA.
- It could be a vehicle to expand the influence of the MGA, but the panels are also limited in their ability to do anything other than advise the national ANSTF/federal agencies, whereas the governors of the MGA can assert downward pressure on the federal agencies in a different way.

There are really three levels of ask: what would we ask the governors to do, what would we ask the states to do (do ourselves), what might we ask MICRA to do?

What if you flip the question: “What could MGA do to support MICRA’s work?” You could probably bring the governors to the table, and specifically send governors’ staff to participate in lobbying efforts during national invasive species week to speak out on federal AIS/ANS policy.

The suggestion arose that this group focus on two fronts: first ask the governors to weigh in on a number of federal decisions and policies that impact the region, then also ask them to give directives to their own agencies related to best practices and interstate cooperation.

The single lead federal agency was a specific item of interest in terms of the governors weighing in on a federal issue.

- This could be in the form of a letter supporting the legislation already in congress that would designate the USFWS as the federal lead on the issue.
- It could be more open, asking for a single lead agency and asking them to figure out the details.
- It could go to the Secretary of the Interior, and/or to the President and the Council on Environmental Quality. The President can do this by executive order.
- The LCCs give Fish & Wildlife an existing avenue to coordinate across some of these issues that touch other federal agencies.
- There was some disagreement about whether LCCs are an effective or sustainable way to pursue this issue. The way around this is a more general statement about making this issue a priority through USFWS leadership.
- A lot of the things that we’ve been talking about (e.g. messaging) can be addressed by having the USFWS make this issue a priority and lead.
- Should the letter ask for USFWS as the lead on just AIS or all invasive species? The group agreed that it would be ideal to have this cover all invasives, but the question of whether that is realistic or achievable was more contentious.
- Could include mention of having a clear, more unified plan/vision and measures of success at a national level
- The states have management plans and the infrastructure is there, the states just need a federal lead to work with.
- Could also include a commitment on the part of the governors to be willing to meet with the president on the issue. You could try to build something around the NGA annual meeting or invasive species awareness week in Feb/March.
- Some governors are skeptical about the value of just writing letters, so we should make sure that this will be received well and get some traction, not just end up in a recycling bin somewhere.
- There can be a set of follow-up actions and an engagement strategy that goes along with the letter to that it’s not just a piece of paper.
- Concepts to include in the letter:
 - There should be a single agency (USFWS) leading on the issue in order to create a unified vision, strategy, priorities, measures of success, etc. and to give states a clear focal point for engagement and accountability.
 - Funding to combat aquatic invasive species (for both research and management) should be a priority, whether through new funding or reallocation of existing funds.

- International screening and prevention of new species from entering the country requires national leadership and coordination.
- Research should be coordinated.
- The USFWS can play a key role in helping to develop and coordinate messaging based on proven impact and to disseminate best practices
- Federal leadership should utilize and bolster the effectiveness of existing coordination infrastructure (e.g. the ANSTF regional panels or possibly the LCCs) and state management plans.

What about sending a letter from MGA about the importance of continued funding? According to Jesse it is unlikely that the governors will agree to a statement on funding, and this isn't something that is coming out of any governors' associations generally. If this is framed as a prioritization issue, not a funding issue it is more plausible that a letter could get consensus support. We could say that our states have made this a priority and call on the federal government to make it a priority.

After the break the group focused on what the Midwestern states can do together as a group through collaboration within the region:

- How can we get the Commissioners/Directors/Secretaries of natural resource agencies involved and engaged? Those are the people carving up budgets and making funding recommendations to the governors.
- What about a meeting of at least some of the commissioners at the end of Dayton's MGA chairmanship?
- What are the items that we want to put in front of the governors?
- It would be helpful to have them issue a directive to all of their state agencies:
 - Highlighting the things that all of the MGA states are doing to make this issue a priority.
 - Directing state agencies to implement state-level actions associated with the national carp management plan.
 - Directing all state agencies (not just natural resource agencies) to lead by example and engage in best practices.
 - Could something related to messaging get incorporated?
 - They could ask that certain things get written into all state personnel policies (Kansas has this for their department but hasn't yet had a lot of success getting it implemented in other agencies).
 - Asking that they make their regulatory systems more complementary across states—but what is the mechanism to do that?
 - This could possibly be announced at the 2013 Annual Meeting of the National Governors Association in Milwaukee (Aug. 2-4). Because it is in the region we are more likely to get many of the Midwestern governors there.
- Currently there isn't a network to coordinate research at the regional level.
 - The governors could ask their land grant universities to work together on risk assessment.
 - USGS has a research coordination program already.

- Some of the Sea Grants have helped to coordinate/prioritize joint research for the Great Lakes, but there hasn't been the same coordination in the Mississippi River basin.
- You could create an invasive species council. Several of the states have councils internal to the state.
- What are the actions that the governors could take to elevate the public's attention on this issue within their convening power? What about a proclamation from each governor during invasive species week?
 - In some ways this is more needed during the summer (July 5th).
 - June is invasive species month, so Memorial Day weekend or right before the fishing opener would be key, maybe even ice-out or when people are putting docks back in for the year.
- Should we pick an initiative that we want to ask the governors to direct resources to? In some states we just need a visible endorsement of the things that we're already doing. It would also give us all more of a clear directive to be at the table when it comes to key opportunities.
- Who would "own" this issue of defining success? Possibly the commissioners, who are accountable to their governors on this issue.
 - For some activities it is very very difficult to develop those metrics.
 - Wisconsin is doing a lot of work to define those metrics: rate of spread, rate of compliance, etc.
- What about compiling a manual of sorts describing all of the state programs that can act as a menu for what a program can include and you can scale those ideas based on your level of funding. There are various frameworks out there. There is an established framework for state management plans.
- Another spin on this would be to have governors issue the directive to find the gaps and look at what's not working in each state.
- It would also be helpful if we could ensure that people know the laws of each state as they cross the state border (through a combination of cross-state education and policy alignment).
 - Is this something we can weave into the joint commitment?
- We could have someone from the MGA come to the next Mississippi River Basin Panel meeting to make some connections to that group.
- One area where it would be helpful to have the commissioners aligned is rapid response.
 - Who would do what? Can we get some MOUs in place?
 - This could involve some scenario planning/exercises. Grass carp would be one good example to work with.
 - Rapid response is often the area of the state management plan that is outward looking beyond state borders.

If there is one thing that needs to happen in the next six months what is it?

- USFWS needs to get in the game, particularly as regards the Mississippi. They need to lead on the control and research efforts, especially on Asian carp.
 - We should be sensitive about how we talk about that (nationalization, federalization, vs. coordination).
 - They have an interstate authority that we just don't have.

- That does involve funding, whether new or redirected.
- Have the governors come together to recognize AIS as an important issue and commit to **support X** in a **visible** way.
 - A joint PSA is one way that we've discussed that we could do this. Maybe all of the governors could be in it or they could agree on a spokesperson.
 - A letter or EO directing certain priorities within all state agencies is another.
 - The added impact of governors' offices participating in invasive species week in Washington would be huge. It could help ensure that we would have an audience with the actual congress people, which would be powerful.

If the federal agencies were here, what would they say that the states should do in the next six months?

- Coordination around rapid response.