



GLRC Rapid Response Communication Protocol¹ October 2007

I. Introduction

Invasive species come from outside an ecosystem, degrade habitat, kill and/or displace native and naturalized species, and short-circuit food webs needed to maintain and rehabilitate biological resources. The Great Lakes region continues to face wave after wave of aquatic invasion. Even after decades of high-profile invasions like the sea lamprey and zebra mussel, the rate of new introductions has not slowed.

Preventing the introduction of AIS is the first line of defense against invasions. However, even the best prevention efforts may not stop all AIS introductions. The Great Lakes Regional Collaboration (GLRC) Strategy recognizes that early detection and rapid response efforts increase the likelihood that invasions will be addressed successfully while populations are still localized and can be contained and eradicated.

A variety of species-specific (e.g. Asian Carp, *Hydrilla*) and location-specific (e.g., National Forest/Park) rapid response contingency plans are under development or have been completed by natural resource, land management, and environmental protection agencies. These specific contingency plans provide the greatest level of preparation for a potential response effort. However, such specific planning is expensive and time consuming. There are many possible AIS species (plant, insect, fish, wildlife), ecosystem types (rivers, lakes, wetlands, etc.), and control methods (nets/trap, chemical application, biological control, etc.) Current agency organizational and fiscal resources do not allow for the development of rapid response plans for all possible events.

As an interim step toward improving AIS response capability, this Rapid Response Communication Protocol will insure that agencies can efficiently coordinate and pool resources when a new invader is detected. The overall function of the Communication Protocol is to ensure there is early and consistent communication between agencies during a Rapid Response assessment and implementation. This protocol could mean the difference between establishment by yet another invasive species or having a well-coordinated multi-agency effort that can control or fully eradicate a newly discovered AIS.

Note: Much of the terminology and approaches which follow have been adopted directly from Great Lakes ANS Panel's *Model Rapid Response Plan for Great Lakes Aquatic Invasions*.

¹Developed at the direction of the GLRC Executive Committee and reflecting all Agency comments.

II. Establishing Formal Agency Points of Contact

No two agencies have the same organizational structure. In order to streamline communication between different agencies, a pre-requisite for this protocol is for each participating agency to identify formal points of contact. This will allow agencies to be responsive to their own internal organizational structure, yet still be able to communicate with others in a methodical way.

Each agency will identify an “Invasive Species Response Coordinator(s)” to serve as the formal point(s) of contact. This Coordinator will be the day-to-day interagency contact and will be ready to be the principal communicator between agencies in the event of a rapid response event.

The agency with management authority over a site of invasion (i.e., Local, State, Tribal, and Federal land management agencies) will ultimately have a central role of organizing the rapid response effort. These landholding agencies will also identify two other points of contact: The “Central Communication Officer” will be the point of contact in charge of coordinating operations with other agencies Invasive Species Response Coordinators. The “Public Communication Officer” will be the main point of contact for matters related to communication to the non-professional public.

III. Rapid Response Communication Protocol

The following protocol is proposed as an appropriate initial step, emphasizing those key activities necessary to ensure early and consistent communication. The Communication Protocol is specifically designed to feed expert knowledge and an assessment of available resources into a jurisdictional authority’s decision making process. The protocol respects existing agency responsibilities while deepening the level of expert advice and resources a jurisdictional authority can draw upon. Additional refinements and elements can be added over time.

Protocol Phase 1: Detection/Confirmation Phase

Following the detection of a possible new invader, the identity of the organism is confirmed by taxonomic experts. Identifying the appropriate taxonomic experts is the challenge in this phase. The following steps will ensure the quick taxonomic confirmation of the suspected organism:

1A: An Agency/organization is made aware of a suspected organism through monitoring or referral.

1B: The Agency contacts taxonomic experts using existing contacts and/or by referencing the National ANSTF Expert Database.

1C: Species is either confirmed or disproved as a new AIS.

Protocol Phase 2: Notification of the Jurisdictional Authority

In this phase, the governmental authority with jurisdiction over the area of invasion is made aware of the presence of a new AIS. This Jurisdictional Authority is responsible for leading the remaining stages of the response effort.

2A: Detecting agency notifies Jurisdictional Authority of new AIS.

2B: Jurisdictional Authority directs “Central Communication Officer” to alert “Invasive Species Response Coordinators” at other agencies of the presence of new AIS. *Note:* “Invasive Species Response Coordinators” may proactively begin to identify possible experts and available resources within their agency at this time.

2C: Jurisdictional Authority notifies “Public Communication Officer” of the presence of the new AIS. A public message may be issued at this time.

Protocol Phase 3: Rapid Assessment and Management Decision

In this phase the jurisdictional authority must quickly assess the potential impacts of the new invader, the control methods that could be used, and the resources which could be devoted to a response effort. It is critically important for an agency to have the benefit of as much expert advice as possible in this phase, so that an informed management decision can be made by the jurisdictional authority.

3A: Jurisdictional Authority leads the formation of an ad hoc “Scientific Assessment Committee” consisting of knowledgeable experts on the particular species and experts with experience with control methods. Because these experts may not be commonly known, the Authority may request participation from other agencies via the “Central Communication Officer” to the “Invasive Species Response Coordinators”, who will follow up on the request within their respective agencies.

3B: The ad hoc “Scientific Assessment Committee” will quickly: assess life history of species, assess potential impacts of species, and assess possible control methods. As an end product, the “Scientific Assessment Committee” provides management options to Jurisdictional Authority.

3C: Jurisdictional Authority deliberates and makes a management decision. Options may include: further exploration of spatial extent, immediate eradication of known population, monitoring to track ecosystem change, etc.

3D: The “Central Communication Officer” notifies Agency “Invasive Species Response Coordinators” of the Management Decision

3E: “Public Communications Officer” may issue public message on Management Decision

Protocol Phase 4: Implementation Phase of Species/Site-specific Response

From this point onward, response planning will likely be species/site-specific and the complexity of the next steps is beyond describing in a general communication protocol. However, all the appropriate contacts will have been made during the early phases of the rapid response effort. In addition, the points of contact included above (“Central Communication Officer”, “Public Communications Officer”, and “Invasive Species Response Coordinators”) would likely be useful components during the implementation stage as well.

IV. Relationship with Existing Forums

Great Lakes ANS Panel

The Great Lakes Panel on Aquatic Nuisance Species has worked to prevent and control the occurrence of aquatic nuisance species in the Great Lakes. The panel was officially convened in late 1991 in response to section 1203 of the Nonindigenous Aquatic Nuisance Prevention and Control Act of 1990 (P.L. 101-646) In establishing the Great Lakes Panel on Aquatic Nuisance Species, Congress recognized that providing sound advice to the ANS Task Force from experts in a highly-impacted region could make a substantial contribution to the collective management effort at both a regional and national level. The panel consists of representatives from government (State, Provincial, Federal, and Tribal), business and industry, universities, citizen environmental groups and others.

The Panel is well-positioned to play a significant role in this effort, and has developed the *Model Rapid Response Plan for Great Lakes Aquatic Invasions*. In December 13-14, 2006 in Ann Arbor, Michigan they specifically discussed the rapid response issue. They are currently in the process of developing an ad hoc rapid response subcommittee. It will be important to ensure coordination with this subcommittee as the GLRC invasive initiative moves forward. The expertise of participating agencies should greatly inform and refine the implementation of the GLRC effort.

Federal AIS Rapid Response Subcommittee

The FAISRR subcommittee was formed in 2006 in response to the Federal Near Term Action Plan in support of the GLRC Strategy:

- The Federal Interagency Task Force will explore creating a Rapid Response Subcommittee under the Regional Working Group to serve as a central point of contact for information and activities related to invasive species rapid response efforts.

Discussions within the Federal Rapid Response Subcommittee have contributed to the proposed GLRC Protocol. In these discussions, the Subcommittee recognized the key role the jurisdictional authority has in a rapid response effort and the need for coordinating and supporting non-federal partners. The FAISRR subcommittee will continue to function as federal points of contact and as a forum for helping coordinate federal actions in a rapid response effort.