

**Introduction to the Great Lakes Panel**  
**Success, Challenges and Work Priorities**

Presented by Mike Conlin, Illinois Dept. of Natural Resources to the Joint Meeting of the Great Lakes and Mississippi River Basin Panels on Aquatic Nuisance Species, June 17, 2008  
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Good Morning!

It's good to be with you in Milwaukee for this joint meeting between the Great Lakes and Mississippi River ANS Panels. I am pleased to provide you with an introduction to the Great Lakes Panel on Aquatic Nuisance Species and highlight some of the Great Lakes Panel's success, challenges and work priorities.

Before I begin, I want to thank the staff of the Great Lakes Commission for helping me compile information for this presentation. I especially want to thank Kathe Glassner-Shwayder who serves as Panel Coordinator and Erika Jensen who has worked closely with Kathe on the planning and preparation for this meeting. I should say that planning a meeting between two ANS Panels is a lot of work that requires persistence and the ability to attend to details. The number of participants gathered here today reflects the importance of this meeting as we work together to address common aquatic invasive species issues of concern between the Great Lakes and Mississippi River basin.

**Introduction to the Great Lakes Panel**

**Nonindigenous Aquatic Nuisance Prevention and Control Act of 1990:** The Great Lakes Panel was established under the Nonindigenous Aquatic Nuisance Prevention and Control Act of 1990 (NANPCA, Public Law 101-646). The passage of this important Act provided much needed federal legislative support for programs aimed at aquatic nuisance species (ANS) prevention and control. The Great Lakes Panel was the first regional ANS Panel to be established under NANPCA. Under Section 1203 of the Act, the Great Lakes Commission, an interstate agency serving the Great Lakes states and provinces and established in both state and federal law, was requested to convene and staff the Great Lakes Panel on Aquatic Nuisance Species. NANPCA's enactment was a response to the growing threat that ANS pose to the environment and economy of the United States and was prompted to a large extent by the introduction of the zebra mussel to the Great Lakes in the mid-1980s. Although the introduction and spread of the zebra mussel played a central role in prompting passage of the federal legislation, NANPCA was also established to prevent the occurrence of new ANS introductions and to limit the dispersal of ANS already in U.S. waters.

**Great Lake Panel on Aquatic Nuisance Species:** Since 1991, the Great Lakes Panel has worked to minimize the introduction and spread of aquatic nuisance species in the Great Lakes. This has been a challenging task given that at least 180 known nonindigenous aquatic species have been introduced into the Great Lakes since the early 1800s.

Establishment of the Great Lakes Panel created a permanent body of regional experts, including representatives from governmental agencies and tribal authorities, scientific researchers, policy makers, outreach specialists, commercial and recreational user groups, and other stakeholders from both the public and private sectors; all of whom are focused on the prevention and control of aquatic invasive species. Although the Great Lakes Panel was established under U.S. federal

legislation, the engagement and participation of Canadian partners on the Panel has been encouraged by the ANS Task Force to provide advice and coordinate efforts to address AIS problems plaguing the binational Great Lakes resource. In addition, effective prevention and control efforts in the Great Lakes region continue to be the first line of defense in slowing or preventing the spread of nonindigenous aquatic nuisance species to other regions (such as the Mississippi River watershed).

To address Great Lakes aquatic invasions, the Panel has been structured through its standing committees to contribute substantially in areas related to information and education, research coordination, and regional policy coordination. Numerous federal, state, and provincial agencies along with tribal, local, and non-governmental entities participate with the Panel to accomplish its mission which is:

- *To coordinate the development of education, research and policy to prevent new aquatic invasive species from entering the Great Lakes basin and to control and mitigate those AIS populations already established.*

### **Successes and Accomplishments of the Great Lakes Panel**

The need for coordination and collaboration on a regional level is essential in order to effectively implement AIS prevention and control strategies across jurisdictional boundaries. The Great Lakes Panel's multijurisdictional representation makes it an effective body to address the complex challenges posed by ANS invasions. Congress recognized the importance of regional ANS panels most notably in their capacity to contribute to the collective effort at the state, regional and national levels by providing sound advice to the ANS Task Force with input from regional experts.

The Great Lakes Panel has benefitted greatly from its relationship with the Great Lakes Commission which has provided secretariat services and staff support to the Great Lakes Panel since its inception in 1991. In addition to providing staff support to the Great Lakes Panel, the Great Lakes Commission also manages issue specific projects related to invasive species that are consistent with Great Lakes Panel priorities and objectives. On many of these current and historic projects, the Panel serves in an advisory capacity to the Commission staff in the conduct of project work.

If you look on the Panel's website, you will quickly see that the Panel has accomplished a lot over the past 17 years. If I were to list all of the completed products, successful workshops, important communications and vital partnerships developed by the Panel I would keep you here the rest of the morning. So I will try to briefly summarize some of the Panel's more significant achievements on a thematic basis.

### **Communications**

The Panel provides a forum for interagency/organizational communication and serves as a vehicle for regional dialogue and discussion on AIS issues.

- Simply stated, one of our biggest successes has to do with the fact that the Great Lakes Panel has been in existence for nearly 18 years and is still going strong. The Panel meets twice per year in different locations throughout the Great Lakes basin.

Another important communications vehicle is the *ANS Update* newsletter. The *ANS Update* is a newsletter insert that is produced and published by the staff of the Great

Lakes Commission. The *Update* serves as an effective outreach tool through coverage on emerging AIS issues, updates from state and provincial members and a listing of upcoming events and publications. Also presented in the newsletter are program reports from the Great Lakes Panel and the ANS Task Force, as well as legislative developments on the AIS issue from Capital Hill.

- Brochures and Booklets have been developed and used effectively as an outreach tool by the Great Lakes Panel. The Panel produced two editions of a booklet called *Biological Invasions* in 1996 and 1998 and in 2007, the Commission completed, with Panel member input, another booklet called *Great Lakes Aquatic Invasions*. This 14-page color booklet provides a comprehensive overview of the AIS challenges in the Great Lakes, including model programs and strategies being conducted in efforts to solve AIS problems. These publications have been designed to raise awareness and understanding on the AIS issue, targeting legislative audiences and Great Lakes user groups

### **Regional Coordination – Position Statements and Action Plans**

The Panel has always played an important role in the area of regional coordination with activities designed to help state and provincial AIS managers in the development and implementation of their own programs.

- The Great Lakes Panel has adopted position statements on ANS research and management needs, federal budgetary and legislative needs, the proposed ruffe control program, ballast water management measures, and sea lamprey control and related Great Lakes Fishery Commission activities. The panel communicates these positions to the national ANS Task Force with a request that these positions be carefully considered and

acted upon, as appropriate, by the Task Force.

- The Panel also developed a Ballast Water Management Position Statement that featured 41 recommendations designed to guide the development of criteria for ballast water management practices and treatment technologies; ensure consistency among ballast management laws and programs in Great Lakes-St. Lawrence basin jurisdictions; and promote the identification of ballast management research needs and development of new technology options. This statement was completed and communicated to the Task Force in 2001.
- In 2001, the Great Lakes Commission in cooperation with the Great Lakes Panel developed a Great Lakes Action Plan, which was signed by the Great Lakes governors, and premiers, to promote a unified and aggressive regional agenda to showcase and advance ongoing efforts to develop and implement comprehensive ANS state and provincial management plans.

### **Building Consensus through Regional Partnerships – Workshops, Symposia and Conferences**

One of the strengths of the Panel has been its role in building consensus through regional partnerships. One of the ways this has been accomplished is through the convening of regional workshops, symposia and conferences. I will briefly describe a few of these important events as examples of how these partnerships have been built and cultivated over the years.

- Symposium on NISA Reauthorization

The Great Lakes Commission, in cooperation with the Great Lakes Panel held a

symposium titled *Looking Back: Assessing Progress in ANS Prevention and Control* in May 2001. The focus of the symposium was to assess regional progress and determine future needs under a decade of federal ANS legislation. The symposia brought together dozens of ANS experts to examine the progress made under NISA, and identified gaps and unmet needs in the legislation, with an emphasis on ballast water management. A concerted effort was made to recognize emerging issues that will drive future ANS prevention and control programs.

- Symposium on Ballast Water Management

In April 1999 the Great Lakes Panel sponsored a symposium titled *Ballast Water Management and Aquatic Nuisance Species: Setting a Research Agenda for the Great Lakes*. Symposium participants reviewed current approaches to ballast water management, assessed prospective technologies and management approaches, and establish associated research priorities. The outcome of this symposium was the development of the ballast water management position statement mentioned above which included 41 recommendations that were forward to the national Task Force in 2001.

- Baltic Sea – Great Lakes: Workshop on Aquatic Invasive Species

In April 2004, the Great Lakes Commission in partnership with the Great Lakes Panel and U.S. EPA's Great Lakes National Program Office (GLNPO) convened an international conference on AIS issues and related opportunities for interregional coordination and collaboration between the Baltic Sea and Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River regions. Workshop participants shared ideas and exchanged information regarding AIS problems and programs in areas of management and policy. Participation included specialists and government officials from the U.S. and Canada, Estonia, Latvia,

Lithuania, and Nordic countries.

### **Model Plans and Guidance**

The Great Lakes Commission working collaboratively with the Great Lakes Panel (with outside funding support from U.S. EPA and other sources) has engaged in several ambitious projects designed to help state and provincial AIS managers advance jurisdictional efforts to prevent the introduction, spread and establishment of AIS. One of the ways this has occurred is through the development of model plans and guidance. Examples of this include:

#### A Model Comprehensive State Management Plan

In 1996, the Commission presented a model comprehensive state management plan to the Great Lakes states as guidance in developing their own plans under Section 1204 of the federal Nonindigenous Aquatic Nuisance Prevention and Control Act (P.L. 101-646). Although prepared specifically for the Great Lakes states, this model plan has also been used by other states and the Canadian provinces.

#### Model Guidance for Legislation, Regulation and Policy

This document was presented to the Great Lakes states and provinces in 1999 to advance interjurisdictional consistency in the development of legislation, regulation and policy for the prevention and control of nonindigenous aquatic nuisance species (ANS). Although prepared specifically for the Great Lakes states and provinces, the model guidance also has been used by other jurisdictions in the region and beyond.

#### A Model Rapid Response Plan For Great Lakes Aquatic Invasions

In 2006, the Commission working with the Panel developed a model rapid response plan as part

of an overall regional effort to enhance capacity to anticipate, prevent and respond to new aquatic invasions of nonindigenous species in the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence region. Guidance presented in the model plan addresses the critical period between introduction and establishment of new AIS populations when the focus of management must shift rapidly from prevention to control/eradication. Marketing the model plan for implementation among the Great Lakes states, provincial and federal agencies on a collaborative basis has also been part of this important effort.

### **Inventories, Databases and Tools**

#### AIS Early Detection and Monitoring: A Pilot Project for the Lake Michigan Basin

This Commission-led project was completed in 2006, has become part of the Panel's ongoing efforts to prevent the introduction and spread of nonindigenous aquatic invasive species (AIS) in the Great Lakes basin. This project produced a set of guidelines and recommendations for a coordinated system to detect new AIS invasions and track the spread of existing invasions in the Lake Michigan basin. It also served as a pilot project to advance the development of a Great Lakes region-wide AIS monitoring program.

#### AIS Research and Information/Education Inventories

In the mid-1990s, the Great Lakes Panel conducted inventories of research and information/education materials. The purpose of the I/E inventory was to provide the public, agency staff, researchers, elected officials and other parties with a comprehensive and easy-to-use guide to informational materials available on aquatic nuisance species in the Great Lakes region.

The goal of the effort to compile information on research was to develop a comprehensive

research inventory to assess current and recently completed ANS research relevant to the Great Lakes Basin, identify research gaps and needs, highlight key findings and, in general, promote technology transfer to benefit the Great Lakes ecosystem.

### **Challenges for the Great Lakes Panel**

I would now like to shift gears and spend a few minutes identifying some of the key challenges facing the Great Lakes Panel.

### **Funding**

I know that funding is an issue for all of the regional panels. As demands for research, education, policy analysis and regional coordination grow, the amount of dollars available to support these activities has been steadily shrinking. For the Great Lakes Panel there have been two sources of funding for general support for the Panel. One is the ongoing support from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service the other is funding to the states under the Interjurisdictional Fisheries Act that has been provided to the Commission by Indiana and for a few years Illinois.

The appropriations authorized under National Invasive Species Act of 1996 (NISA) which reauthorized NANPCA , included \$300,000 annually to the Department of the Interior, to be used by the Director to "fund regional panels and similar entities". The authorization also designated \$100,000 (of the total \$300,000) to be used to fund activities of the Great Lakes Commission in support of the Great Lakes Panel. NISA and its appropriations authorization expired in 2002 and has not been reauthorized since, despite repeated introductions of legislation in Congress since 2002 (i.e. the National Aquatic Invasive Species Act). While the Commission never received the full \$100,000 from FWS in any given year, the Commission did receive \$75,000 per year from 2001-2003. Since then, support for the Great Lakes Panel has been reduced to \$50,000 per year

as the other regional panels came on line. So the Great Lakes Panel has been losing ground financially at a time when the work of the Panel is more important than ever. This is a serious matter that needs to be rectified.

### **Maintaining and Strengthening Regional Partnerships**

The growing demand from policymakers and the general public to address the threat posed by AIS and the increasing competition for limited funding to support these activities has increased the importance of cooperation and collaboration among the many agencies, groups, institutes and individuals involved in this issue. The Panel has been and continues to be a model for regional partnerships and regional coordination. However, we need to continually be asking ourselves whether we have all of the critical stakeholders sitting at the table. A few years ago under the leadership of former Panel Chair Ron Martin, recently retired from Wisconsin DNR, the Panel created an opportunity to add at-large members to bring in new groups and expertise to help us do our work. This has resulted in new partnerships and new ideas coming into the Panel, especially from industry groups not originally identified in the 1990 legislation. With increased attention being given to the AIS issue both regionally and nationally, with new species being found in the Great Lakes ecosystem on a steady basis, the Great Lakes Panel and the other regional Panels need to continually reexamine our membership and partnerships to make sure that we are continuing to be viable and effective.

### **Great Lakes Panel Recommendations Submitted to the ANS Task Force**

- **AIS Taxonomic Expert Data Base:** Great Lakes Panel recommends that the ANS Task Force develop a formal letter of request to experts to contribute their name and information to the Invasive Species Experts Database (May 2007).
- **Funding for ANS State Management Plans:** The Great Lakes Panel recommends that the ANS 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 (November 2007).

- **AIS Dispersal Barrier:** Great Lakes Panel recommends to the ANS Task Force to consider the concern being voiced by many of the institutions represented by Great Lakes Panel members for legislation that will immediately provide authority and funding to construct, operate and maintain the aquatic invasive species (AIS) dispersal barrier on the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal (January 2007).
- **Ballast Water Regulations:** The Great Lakes Panel respectfully urges the ANSTF to do all it can to help Congress resolve outstanding issues to effectively regulate ballast water through passage of federal legislation. Strengthening ballast water regulation is critical to protect the environmental health and economic strength of the Great Lakes region and beyond (February 2008).

### **Ability to communicate regional needs and priorities to entities other than to the national ANS Task Force**

A few years ago, the Executive Committee of the Great Lakes Panel began working on operational guidance for the Panel since formal guidance had not been developed when first established in 1991. . As other Panels were formed and as the Great Lakes Panel matured, it became clear that we needed to have more formal guidance to help us clarify roles between the staff and the Panel, the Panel and the Task Force, but also between the Panel and elected officials. With regard to this latter point, the Great Lakes Panel has a long history of effective education, communication and advocacy with agency officials and policymakers at the state and federal level. This seemed natural to us mainly because of our relationship with the Commission which represents regional interests of the Great Lakes states to the U.S. Congress and has longstanding relationships with both the administrative and executive branch of the U.S. government. As the other Panels came on line and developed their own guidance it became clear to us and the national Task Force that the Great Lakes Panel was potentially working outside of its authority as an advisory committee to the Task Force. So our Policy Coordination Committee has been spending a lot of time working on guidance that will allow the Panel to continue to be

an effective communications body on issues related to AIS where there is strong consensus. As part of this effort, we are working more closely with our regional partners holding the ability to directly advocate for funding, legislation and programmatic authority that is needed to combat the introduction and spread of AIS in the Great Lakes region.

### **Being Proactive rather than Reactive to Emerging Issues**

Related to last point, the Great Lakes Panel is aware of the need to be proactive on emerging issues related to AIS in the Great Lakes. This means that the Great Lakes Panel Committees are doing more work between meetings and we are striving for better and more timely communication of Panel priorities to the ANS Task Force so that we can encourage the Task Force to take action on the important AIS issues affecting the Great Lakes. We have also begun to streamline the review and approval process for writing and sending letters and developing Panel priorities. To do this, we have begun to rely more heavily on our Panel Executive Committee, which consists of the chair, vice chair and three committee chairs.

### **Current Work Priorities**

Later today, the standing committees of the two Panels will be meeting together to share information about their current priorities and to consider opportunities to develop a coordinated work plan. The Great Lakes Panel has three standing committees; Information/Education, Research Coordination and Policy Coordination. Most of the Panel priorities are accomplished through the work of these three committees. Over the next few minutes I'll describe the priorities of each standing committee:

#### ***Information/Education***

The current chair of the I/E is Rochelle Sturtevant, with the Great Lakes Sea Grant Network

Over the past year, Committee members have worked to develop a mission statement and objectives to guide future work of the Committee. A draft of these guiding principles is complete and once finalized, will be posted on the Panel website and included in the Panel Guidance for Operations.

Priorities under the current work plan include, among others:

- Finalizing a mission statement and goals for the Committee;
- Developing a dissemination strategy for the Committee priorities document; and
- Populating the national ANS Task Force Experts Database which has progressed significantly over the last year in part due to the work and the leadership of the Committee Chair.
- Developing a priority statement regarding near-term priorities for AIS information, education and outreach for a grant-making selection process .
- Dissemination of the Great Lakes Aquatic Invasions Booklet, targeting a legislative audience.

### ***Research Coordination***

The current chair of the Research Coordination Committee is Dr. Phil Moy, Fisheries and Invasive Species Specialist with Wisconsin Sea Grant. Over the past year, Committee members have worked on several identified priorities as follows:

- Several years ago, the Research Committee completed an Aquatic Invasive Research Priorities Document. Each year the Committee reviews this document and makes changes based on the work plan priorities of the current year.
- The Committee has developed a Priority Species List: The Committee has worked to update a Priority Species List to draw attention to those organisms with known and

significant adverse impacts on the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River ecosystem, its users and uses. The list is intended to be dynamic, shifting and changing as research develops, populations fluctuate, new impacts are found and new organisms of concern appear on the horizon. The list identifies those organisms that the Committee believes deserve some research attention. Committee members and staff have also worked to develop criteria for listing and de-listing to form the basis for screening species.

- An extension of the priority species list is the development of a regional prohibited and restricted species list. This effort, which began in 2007, will result in a list of all species regulated in each of the Great Lakes states and provinces. The list will be used to increase awareness and advance consistency on both regulatory and voluntary management of high-risk species in the region.

### ***Policy Coordination Committee***

The current chair of the Policy Coordination Committee is Jennifer Nalbone, Habitat and Biodiversity Coordinator with Great Lakes United.

Recent work of this Committee has focused on the development of a mission statement and objectives and guidelines by which the Committee can operate in order to provide valuable information and tools to the region, communicate the importance of the AIS issues to policymakers and decisionmakers as well as provide recommendations to the ANS Task Force. Once finalized, these guidelines will be posted on the Panel website and incorporated, along with those of the other standing committees, into the Panel Guidance for Operations. The current Committee work plan includes the following items:

- Development of a recommendation for the ANS Task Force encouraging the Task Force,

through their leadership, to support authorization and funding of the ANS dispersal barrier in the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal;

- Development of a recommendation for federal comprehensive AIS legislation;
- Formation of a Panel ad-hoc committee to address rapid response recommendations from the Task Force; and
- Investigation of the potential for a Panel meeting session exploring the relationship between International Maritime Organization ballast water standards and domestic regulations.

### **Future Directions**

I want to close with a few comments on future directions for the Great Lakes Panel

#### Identifying Panel Priorities

With changes in this area occurring rapidly the need for the Panel to continually review and identify its priorities is crucial. The Standing Committees do this on an annual basis and we need to spend more time as an entire Panel to set our annual priorities. This is even more important to help us prioritize funding and allocation of resources. Two areas that are emerging for the Great Lakes Panel are rapid response planning and the development of screening tools to stop the introduction and spread of AIS. .

The battle against aquatic invasions is a longterm commitment where coordination of the Great Lakes Panel with our neighbors from the Mississippi River Basin Panel is pivotal. I look forward to our dialogue over the next few days with the hope and expectation that we can join forces in achieving progress on common goals. I appreciate the opportunity to be here with my colleague Doug Keller to initiate this very important work.