

**For immediate release**

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## Great Lakes Commission to tackle Internet sales of aquatic invasive species

**Ann Arbor, Mich.** – The Great Lakes Commission (GLC) has received a \$400,000 grant through the U.S. EPA-led Great Lakes Restoration Initiative to develop and demonstrate web-crawling software to assess the availability of aquatic invasive species for purchase – and identify sellers of those species – on the Internet.

Intentional and unintentional releases of live organisms that are bought and sold for use in aquariums, nurseries, water gardens, aquaculture, as live bait and for other uses make up a complex vector (organisms in trade) for invasive species that can adversely affect the Great Lakes.

Internet commerce facilitates trade in live organisms – providing consumers, hobbyists and others on-demand access to distribution networks worldwide – but because of its scope and complexity, little is being done to prevent potentially invasive species from being imported, traded or released into the Great Lakes environment via this pathway.

The GLC will develop a web crawler that will search the Internet for invasive species of concern to the Great Lakes, including species that are currently regulated by Great Lakes jurisdictions and those that have been identified as posing an invasion risk to the region. The project will engage federal, state, university and nongovernmental organizations to provide input on the development of the system and options for advancing management of this pathway.

Sellers identified through this project will be contacted with information on relevant regulations and potential risks associated with the species of concern that they are selling, as well as safe care and disposal alternatives they can share with their customers to minimize the risk that invasive organisms will be released into the environment.

“The Internet plays a vital role in commerce today but its potential role in spreading unwanted plants and animals is poorly understood. We are excited to develop a tool that will better quantify the overall risks associated with this pathway and provide important management guidance for sellers, decisionmakers and regulators,” said Tim Eder, executive director of the Great Lakes Commission.

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### Great Lakes Commission

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Research has shown that restricted plants and animals are readily available online:

- The Global Invasive Species Programme found that of 77 aquatic plant species restricted from sale in the United States, 45 percent are available for sale on the Internet.
- Another study found that 60 percent of the 25 invasive plants prohibited for sale by federal or Minnesota state laws were available for purchase by mail and the Internet. Further investigation of this issue included successful ordering and shipment of prohibited species.

The Great Lakes invasive species web monitoring system will be made available for use by regulators, managers and others when the project is completed. The project will also present options for additional actions to effectively prevent further releases via this pathway.

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*The Great Lakes Commission, chaired by Kenneth G. Johnson, water division administrator at the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, is an interstate compact agency established under state and U.S. federal law and dedicated to promoting a strong economy, healthy environment and high quality of life for the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence region and its residents. The Commission consists of governors' appointees, state legislators, and agency officials from its eight member states. Associate membership for Ontario and Québec was established through the signing of a "Declaration of Partnership." The Commission maintains a formal Observer program involving U.S. and Canadian federal agencies, tribal authorities, binational agencies and other regional interests. The Commission offices are located in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Learn more at [www.glc.org](http://www.glc.org).*