

# Great Lakes Regional AIS Response Framework Communications Plan

*Adopted: December 2021*

## Introduction

Development of this communications plan was initiated in 2019 when it became apparent that specific, detailed guidance surrounding communications was necessary for effective implementation of the Aquatic Invasive Species Interstate Response Framework (Framework). The Framework laid out a general process (Figure 2) for state agencies to systematically quantify risk and assess feasibility of response actions to newly discovered AIS. This process included determinations of when communication is necessary but did not provide direction about what information was expected to be communicated, how it should be communicated, or to whom it should be communicated.

This appendix serves as an extension of the Framework, providing the specific expectations for each point in the response process where communication is required. It is intended to guide communications as they are called for within the Framework through explicit explanations of roles, responsibilities, and timeline for each communication step. The plan provides an outline of how to communicate with the understanding that responsible State Incident or Unified Command team member(s) will likely require some flexibility to shape communications around specific findings and incidents, and that specific communications will likely differ between different scenarios and different steps within the Framework. As such, we have tried to keep communication steps as consistent as possible with each other while still fulfilling the specific communication needs at each point in the response process.

The development of the communications plan was funded through a GLRI grant from the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) (funding opportunity F18AP00560). This communications plan was developed between August 22, 2019, and June 30, 2021 and is the product of face-to-face and web-based discussions among “core” team members, technical advisors, and “active” observers from Canadian partner agencies as well as a mock desktop response exercise.

Core management team participants and affiliations included:

- Kevin Irons and Vic Santucci (Illinois Department of Natural Resources)
- Eric Fischer (Indiana Department of Natural Resources)
- Sarah LeSage (MDEQ) – Project Manager
- Seth Herbst and Lucas Nathan (Michigan Department of Natural Resources)
- Kelly Pennington (Minnesota Department of Natural Resources)
- Catherine McGlynn, and Dave Adams (New York State Department of Environmental Conservation)
- John Navarro (Ohio Department of Natural Resources)
- James Grazio (Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection)
- Robert Wakeman and Maureen Ferry (Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources)
- Amy McGovern (USFWS – Grant officer) Kate Wyman-Grothem, and Rob Simmons (USFWS)

Representatives from Canadian provinces also participated as active observers on the management agency team. These included:

- Francine MacDonald and Jeff Brinsmead (Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry)
- Olivier Morissette (Ministère des Forêts, de la Faune et des Parcs)

This communications plan is based on the Invasive Fishes Communications Protocol developed by the Council of Great Lakes Fisheries Agencies. Press release guidance is based on the Asian Carp Regional Coordinating Committee's Communications Workgroup's Communication Strategic Plan. By building on elements from these well-established and successful communications strategies, we aim to continue improving regional coordination.

### How To Use This Document

First and foremost, this plan lays out suggested communications guidance as a best practice, not a mandatory requirement. The guidance presented here was developed with the IEDRR core team to more clearly define the parameters of communication relevant to a response action. The IEDRR Core team represent the agencies and tribal authorities who have lead response management authority (Fig. 1). While the plan is designed to provide communication guidance that is relevant and appropriate to a wide variety of possible species detections and response actions, it is not an exhaustive guide and should not be treated as such. When in doubt about whether or how to communicate, it is always best for users to err on the side of overcommunicating than under communicating. This mindset should also extend to new detections made by a third party unrelated to a state agency or the IEDRR core team. While this plan does not provide guidance specific to this scenario, it is recommended that the lead state agency that receives the report from the third party share that report with the IEDRR core team as soon as they become aware of it.

Further, this plan is not designed to be restrictive in its guidance; rather than outlining a limit of communication that should occur at each step, the plan recommends an aspirational baseline of communication. Users should not feel as though they are restricted to only the guidance laid out in each step and should feel free to go beyond it. Notably, the plan recommends that a press release be drafted and shared at least as part of the final steps of the Framework, when developing and implementing a response plan. A press release can occur at any other point at the discretion of the lead state agency, but the IEDRR core team should always be notified informally and/or under embargo prior to the public notice of a press release.

Communications guidance in this appendix are designed to be paired with the existing Framework flowchart determination process for response activities. The flowchart has been reprinted in this appendix for reference. Blue stars accompany steps in the flowchart where specific communication guidance is necessary, and guidance corresponding to each numbered star follows the flowchart. Scope and responsibilities follow those laid out in the Framework, namely that all steps designated with an S are expected to be undertaken by a state incident command team, whereas steps designated with an R are expected to be completed by a regional unified command team.

Communication guidance given in this plan is designed to be specific to the Framework. Agencies conducting response activities may choose to implement other relevant communications protocols alongside this one; it is assumed that agencies and partners operating through the Framework will follow the communication guidance given in this appendix in addition to any other parallel communication plans, as this appendix does not supersede any other state or federal communications plans, including communications guidelines laid out in the Great Lakes St. Lawrence Governors & Premiers' Mutual Aid Agreement for Combating Aquatic Invasive Species Threats to the Great Lakes - St. Lawrence River Basin should that agreement be utilized.

The geographic scope of this plan covers the Great Lakes basin, i.e., all the streams, rivers, lakes, and other bodies of water within the drainage basin of the Great Lakes. At the discretion of the lead state agency for a response action, this plan may also be applied to detections outside of the Great Lakes basin, particularly for discoveries that may be of interest to the IEDRR core team or geographically close to waters within the Great Lakes basin.

While the Framework is designed to cover a full taxonomic scope of aquatic invasive species, including plants, algae, invertebrates, and fish, the taxonomic scope of this communications plan is limited to plants, algae, invertebrates, and other non-fish species. **In the event that the species identified through step S1 of the framework is a fish species, communications should follow the Invasive Fishes Communications Protocol, even as state incident and regional unified command teams continue to work through the Framework for response activities.** If the fish species identified through step S1 is an invasive carp (i.e., bighead carp *Hypophthalmichthys nobilis*, black carp *Mylopharyngodon piceus*, grass carp *Ctenopharyngodon idella*, or silver carp *Hypophthalmichthys molitrix*), response and communications activities should be managed through the Invasive Carp Regional Coordinating Committee. Further, the guidance provided in this communications plan is designed only for detections of organisms, alive or dead. The detection of eDNA is not considered within the scope of this plan, and communication of eDNA results should follow any relevant state/federal communications plans. In the absence of a relevant communication plan for eDNA, reporting agencies may consider following the guidance provided in the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service's Quality Assurance Project Plan for eDNA Monitoring of Bighead and Silver Carps.

Finally, this plan operates on an understanding that communication will always take place in the event of the detection of a species on the IEDRR Surveillance Watch List or range expansion or new introduction of species on the Great Lakes St. Lawrence Governors & Premiers' AIS Least Wanted list. While it is possible that a detection of one of these species may not lead to a response action, communicating these reports to the IEDRR core team is still valuable for information sharing and relevant research efforts.

#### Determining Who To Communicate With Through This Plan

As stated above, this plan lays out suggested communications guidance as a best practice, not a mandatory requirement. Figure 1, below, provides some initial suggestions of who to communicate with at the various steps within this plan. As a general consideration, when

communicating with partners in outer rings, that communication should also be shared with relevant partners in inner rings. Figure 1 is not prescriptive and does not require communication with every partner listed; it is likely that specific scenarios will include communication to partners not listed and that partners may shift between rings based on the specific factors of a detection or response. In all scenarios and activities, it is up to the best judgment of the responding lead state agency. Finally, when in doubt about who to communicate with, it is always best for users to err on the side of overcommunicating than under communicating.

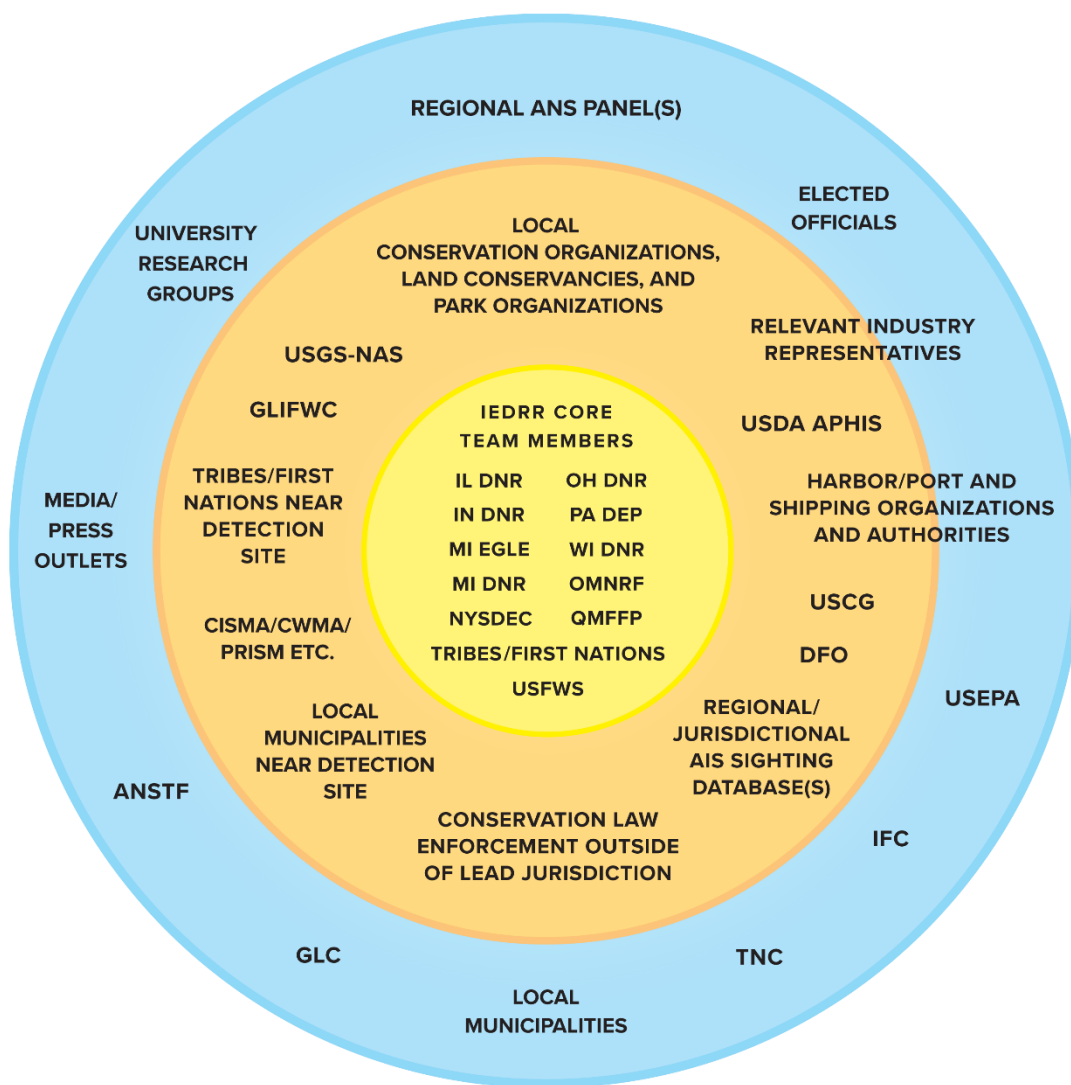


Figure 1. Partners to consider communicating with throughout use of this plan.

# Great Lakes Regional AIS Response Framework *(From the Great Lakes Basin Aquatic Invasive Species Interstate Response Framework, Page 10)*

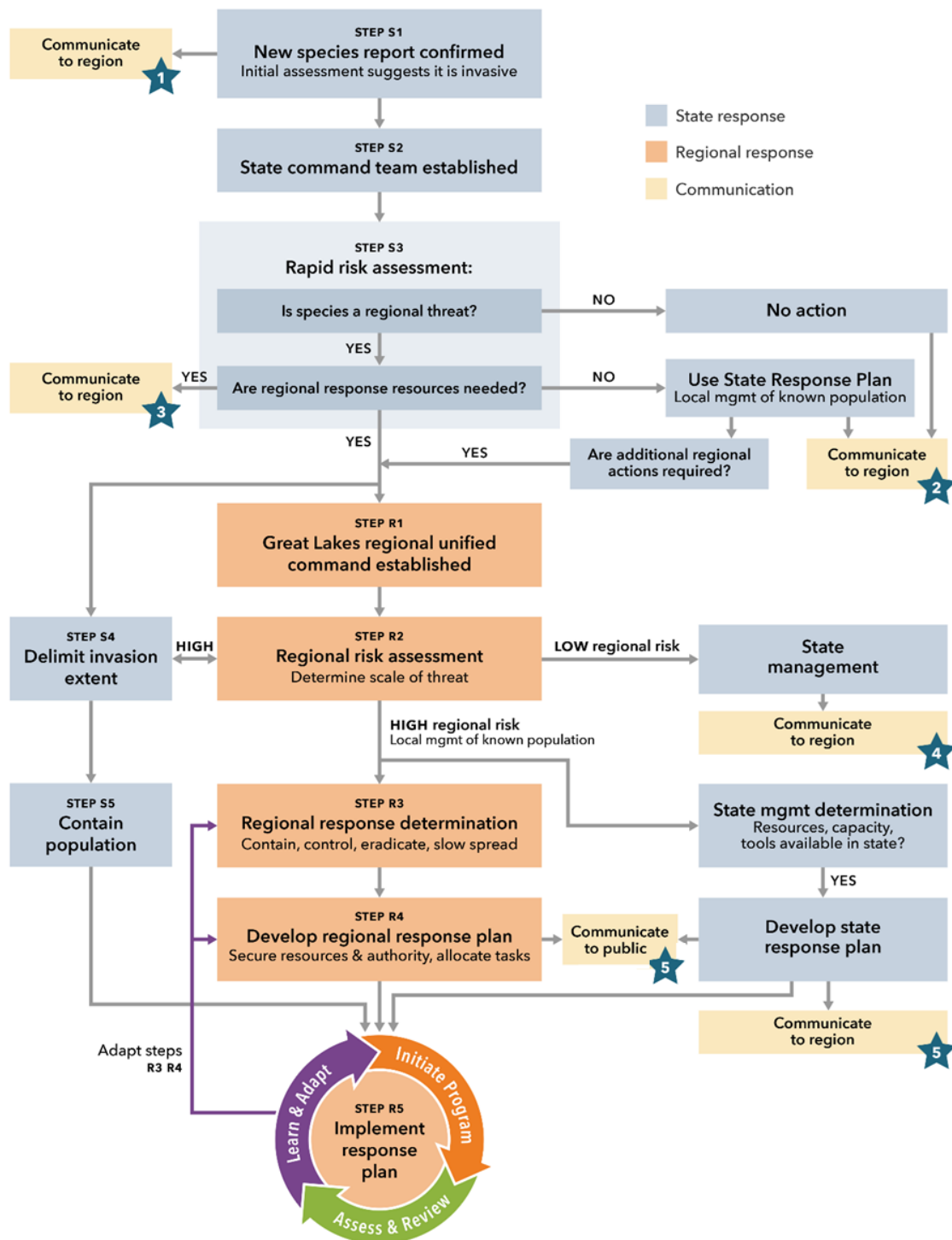


Figure 2. Process for state agencies to systematically quantify risk and assess feasibility of response actions to newly discovered AIS



**Step S1: New species report confirmed.** Following the confirmation of a new species report, communications procedure should be determined based on the taxa and status of the new species:

- **If the species is a fish, the responsible state agency should follow the Invasive Fishes Communications protocol throughout this response process**
- If the species is a plant, algae, invertebrate, or other non-fish species, the responsible state agency should follow the communications procedures outlined in this appendix
- If the species is new to North America, the detection should be communicated to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the IEDRR core team as soon as possible after confirmation

Communication at this step is at the discretion of the lead state agency and may include informal notification of IEDRR core team members, relevant local partners, and/or conservation law enforcement (particularly for detections within a pathway, rather than a waterbody). It is recommended that the lead state agency refrain from communicating a new detection until species identification has been confirmed to avoid confusion.



**Step S3: Rapid risk assessment.** Following the state-initiated rapid risk assessment, communication to at least IEDRR core team members will take place in the case of a **low risk** determination or a **high risk** determination where a regional response is not warranted and the incursion can be addressed through implementation of a state's response plan:

**Who:** Relevant State Incident Command team member(s) with communications responsibility

**What:** Develop a Response Description Form describing the detection and risk assessment determination

**How:**

- Respond to prompts in the Response Description Form (Appendix A)
- Supporting documents that should be attached to the form include:
  - Narrative description of the detection
  - Any risk assessments completed as part of the IEDRR Response Framework
  - Additional files or links as necessary, including details from species confirmation
- Talking points should be drafted according to Invasive Fishes Communication Protocol guidance per step 2 in the Invasive Fishes Communication Protocol
- Once complete, the form should be emailed to at least all IEDRR core team members with a high priority email flag
- Partners should refrain from external communication until the lead state agency chooses to share a press release or otherwise communicate to the public
- In the event that comments are received from partners and a feedback loop is initiated, the lead state agency may choose to repeat this step as recommended above, convene the IEDRR core team via phone/video call, or continue conversation in another format

**When:** Unless otherwise stipulated by a responsible agency, the Invasive Fishes Communication Protocol timeline should be followed, meaning that a good-faith effort should be made to report **IMPORTANT** events to at least IEDRR core team members within five (5) business days of the species confirmation/risk assessment determination. Partners that receive communication will then have three (3) business days from initial email notification to respond to the notification with comments.

For these low risk determinations, it is recommended that the lead state agency share annual reports on the status of the species/population with the IEDRR core team membership. This may include monitoring updates, follow-up response activities, etc., and is at the discretion of the lead state agency.



**Step S3: Rapid risk assessment.** Following the state-initiated rapid risk assessment, communication to at least IEDRR core team members will take place in the case of a **high risk** determination **PRIOR** to initiating Step R1:

**Who:** Relevant State Incident Command team member(s) with communications responsibility

**What:** Develop a Response Description Form describing the detection and risk assessment determination

**How:**

- Respond to prompts in the Response Description Form (Appendix A)
- Supporting documents that should be attached to the form include:
  - Narrative description of the detection
  - Any risk assessments completed as part of the IEDRR Response Framework
  - Additional files or links as necessary, including details from species confirmation
- Talking points should be drafted according to Invasive Fishes Communication Protocol guidance per step 2 in the Invasive Fishes Communication Protocol
- Once complete, the form should be emailed to at least IEDRR core team members with a high priority email flag

**When:** Unless otherwise stipulated by a responsible agency, the Invasive Fishes Communication Protocol timeline should be followed, meaning that **URGENT** events should be communicated at least to IEDRR core team members within 24 hours of the species confirmation/risk assessment determination



**Step R2: Regional risk assessment.** Following the assessment of risk to the Great Lakes region, communication to at least IEDRR core team members and relevant local partners will take place in the case of a **low risk** determination:

**Who:** Relevant Unified Command team member(s) with communications responsibility

**What:** Develop a Response Description Form describing the regional risk assessment determination

**How:**

- Respond to prompts in the Response Description Form (Appendix A)
- Supporting documents that should be attached to the form include:
  - Narrative description of the detection
  - Any risk assessments completed as part of the IEDRR Response Framework
  - Additional files or links as necessary, including details from species confirmation
- Talking points should be drafted according to Invasive Fishes Communication Protocol guidance per step 2 in the Invasive Fishes Communication Protocol
- Once finalized, the form should be emailed to at least IEDRR core team members and relevant local partners with a high priority email flag

**When:**

- The Unified Command team should finalize the Response Description Form and talking points and disseminate it to at least IEDRR core team members and relevant local partners within five (5) business days of the risk assessment determination



**Step R4: Develop response plan.** Following the development of a regional response plan to a specific incursion, communication to all relevant partners and public entities will take place

**Who:** Relevant Unified Command team member(s) with communications responsibility

**What:**

- Develop a Response Description Form outlining the regional response plan
- Develop a press release to be distributed to public entities
- In the case of response actions planned in an area with federal threatened/endangered species, communication should be coordinated with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and all communication products and talking points should be shared with USFWS as well

**How:**

- Respond to prompts in the Response Description Form (Appendix A)
- Supporting documents that should be attached to the form include:
  - Narrative description of the detection
  - Any risk assessments completed as part of the IEDRR Response Framework
  - Additional files or links as necessary, including details from species confirmation
- Talking points should be drafted according to Invasive Fishes Communication Protocol guidance per step 2 in the Invasive Fishes Communication Protocol
- Once finalized, the form should be emailed to at least IEDRR core team members and relevant local partners with a high priority email flag
- A press release should be drafted and include the following as applicable (per Asian Carp Regional Coordinating Committee Live Fish Notification Protocol guidance):
  - Where the species was found
  - How many, and what species
  - Size of individual(s), and adult or juvenile



- Who found the individual(s)
- Who confirmed the identification
- Date and time found
- Current location of individual(s) now (e.g., removed from system or still present)
- Once finalized, the press release should be distributed to all other contacts. The press release may also be sent to additional public entity contacts as necessary based on the nature of findings (e.g., additional media outlets or specific elected officials in the jurisdiction where the detection was made)

**When:**

- The Unified Command team should finalize the Response Description Form and talking points and disseminate it to at least IEDRR core team members and relevant local partners within five (5) business days of finalizing the regional response plan
- The Unified Command team should draft the press release and provide it to the IEDRR core team members within three (3) business days of finalizing the regional response plan. IEDRR core team members will be under embargo not to share the press release until it is disseminated publicly by the lead state agency
- The Unified Command team should finalize the press release and talking points and disseminate it to public entities within two (2) additional business days following distribution of the press release to IEDRR core team members