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Industries Challenge with Aquatic Invasive Species

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Program Need

Over the past several decades, there has been a heightened national concern regarding the impacts of invasive species on our natural resources. Aquatic invasive species are now considered by some experts to be the second most important threat to biodiversity after habitat destruction. Cornell University researchers estimate the negative economic impact of non-native plants alone is approximately \$137 billion annually. Unfortunately, this survey included pathogens, bacteria, and unrelated invasive species that impact land and water resources. It will be important for a University to invest its resources to come up with a real picture on the economic impacts of both land and aquatic invasive species for industries to develop initiatives and programs to help stop the transport of invasive species both nationally and internationally.

Aquatic species disrupt commerce by clogging pipes and drains, impact water quality, reduce property values, decrease diversity and degrade the resource for the recreational boating and fishing. Healthy aquatic ecosystems are integral to the recreational boating and fishing industry.

Two specific examples of invasive species impacts on the recreational waters are Hydrilla, a submerged aquatic grass, and the Zebra Mussel. Hydrilla occurs in all of the Gulf and Atlantic coast states and on the West Coast in California and Washington. The Potomac River, the nation's river, Hydrilla makes up 60% of the underwater grasses, choking out native species. Zebra Mussels alone have cost the Great Lakes region an estimated \$3 billion over the last 10 years.

Five bills in the United States House of Representatives were introduced in March 2003 to prevent the spread of invasive species through research, long term measures and technical assistance. On February 19, 2003 Senator Carl Levin (D-MI) introduced an amendment to the Nonindigenous Aquatic Nuisance Prevention and Control Act (NANPCA) of 1990 which, if passed will reauthorize and enhance the Act. With the introduction of the Senate amendment and House bills, timing could not be better to create a potentially powerful private/public partnership to prevent the spread of invasive species in a nationwide campaign.

MOAA's Response

Marinas nationwide are positioned to act as catalysts for education and outreach about aquatic non-native species to anglers, recreational boaters and the community. Clean Marina initiatives nationwide have earned recognition as programs illustrating industry and government working together to improve the environment. These voluntary programs assist the efforts of MOAA's 1500 plus members to serve as stewards of the environment. Marinas provide the geographic location on the water to share information regarding the transportation and eradication of invasive species in recreational waters.

MOAA will be signing an MOU with the National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration, the Nature Conservancy and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to create a program that will engage marina operators, boaters, anglers and communities in a proactive approach that will be incorporated in the Clean Marina initiative to stop the transport of aquatic invasive species and educate the public about their impacts. It builds upon existing partnerships within the industry and offers marinas a prudent role in establishing a leadership position in this expensive and ecologically critical issue.

In a survey conducted in April 2002 by a consultant working for both the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, 95% of state agencies said they would be interested in participating in a national marketing initiative for aquatic invasive species. The most popular strategy of state fisheries divisions to address invasive species is public awareness and outreach campaigns.

Challenges

Funding is the most significant obstacle in addressing aquatic invasive species. Many state and federal fund streams have been cut in the last year. To make up for this cut in funding, Wallop/Breaux Act monies have been diverted to supplement the state invasive aquatic programs. Creative programs springing from public/private partnerships yield a broader net of public participation and education. The US Fish and Wildlife Service already has a new campaign called "Stop Aquatic Hitchhikers". Private financial support will significantly leverage public dollars in this campaign and educational program.