

Guidelines for Developing Commercial Harvest Policy for Aquatic Invasive Species

Mississippi River Basin Panel on Aquatic Nuisance Species

An Invasive species means an alien species whose introduction does or is likely to cause economic or environmental harm or harm to human health.¹ Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) that have invaded, or may yet invade, the Mississippi River Basin could have commercial or recreational value. While this creates financial opportunities, it could result in serious problems if the potential value of the species provides a stimulus for people to expand the range of those species. This is also true if fishery policies inadvertently foster a more rapid or extensive distribution of AIS.

The Mississippi River Basin Panel (MRBP) consists of members representing 9 federal agencies, 26 states/provinces, 7 regional entities, 2 environmental/user groups, 4 private/commercial groups, 2 university/research institutions and 2 at large stakeholders, for a total of 52 members from within the 32-state Mississippi River Basin. With such a diverse group, a common set of management principles is essential for establishing a strategy to guide efforts to control introduction and spread of ANS within the basin.

Below are a set of principles that are offered for guidance in developing policies for commercial harvest of ANS. Each jurisdiction must give careful consideration to how local regulations may help foster an effective basin-wide approach to managing commercial fisheries for ANS.

- 1. Kill aquatic invasive species immediately upon harvest.** All harvested aquatic invasive species should be immediately killed to reduce the risk of transport and introduction beyond their current range.
- 2. Identify aquatic invasive species and label appropriately.** Either all harvested aquatic invasive species, or an appropriate subset of containers in which they are stored, should be identified (Genus and species) and labeled appropriately. Misidentified organisms and mislabeled containers should trigger enforcement actions.
- 3. Require data submission.** Harvesters should be required to submit detailed reports which can be reviewed and collated to track critical species information. Falsification of these reports should be dealt with by enforcement action.
- 4. Regulate harvest locations and seasons.** The potential harvest of aquatic invasive species may result in increased harvest effort, which may adversely affect native species. Harvest locations and open seasons should be regulated to minimize negative impacts on native species.
- 5. Require cleaning or disinfection.** Harvesters should ensure that transportation of equipment does not result in further spread of aquatic invasive species.

- 6. Maintain flexibility.** Policies should be formulated that facilitate rapid change through use of experimental fisheries, temporary rules, sunset provisions, etc. Policies should be reviewed often, and adjusted as new technologies or data become available.
- 7. Openly communicate objectives.** Resource agencies should clearly state their goals and objectives for allowing harvest and/or use of a particular aquatic invasive species (e.g. commercial harvest as part of an individual species control program). Government agencies should be careful not to create expectations that are unsustainable. Likewise, investors must not overcapitalize an industry in which depletion of the raw materials is a primary objective. Exit strategies should be created while developing any harvest plan, and alternate sources of raw materials should be anticipated.

¹ Executive Order 13112, signed on February 3, 1999.