

# Arizona ANS Pilot State Communications

## Final Report

March 31, 2006



**Arizona Department of Game and Fish  
International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies**



This project was funded by Multistate Conservation Grant #DC M-31-C, awarded by the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (IAFWA) in cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, as established by the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Programs Improvement Act of 2000 (Pub. L. 106-408).

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## I. Status of ANS within the agency prior to the pilot project

**Introduced vs. invasive species:** There are a host of species that currently occur or are resident within the state of Arizona that are introduced. Not all of those species are considered by the Arizona Department of Game and Fish as invasive or nuisance species.

This is a potential area of confusion and potential controversy among different sectors of the public. For example, most of Arizona's sport fishes are introduced, and some are unwanted in selected areas where the management focus is on native aquatic species. Hence, the issue of which resident species meet some definition of invasive can pose considerable disagreement dependent upon the view of that sector.

**Clearly unwanted species:** Rather than direct our focus at long resident and productively managed species, we direct our gaze at those species that are clearly unwanted; are not present or are present in low and controllable numbers; or are foreseen as potential threats. Among key focal species are:

1. Crayfishes, widely distributed but largely accepted by the public as deleterious.
2. Zebra mussel, a species not present in Arizona but one that poses a considerable threat if accidentally transported to the state.
3. Aquatic weeds (especially giant salvinia and hydrilla) that can be the subject of behaviorally based preventative measures.

**Invasive weeds:** Aquatic nuisance species have long been an issue of concern within Arizona; however they generally have not been the subject of significant program development. While the Game and Fish Department does not have statutory authority for vegetation in Arizona, the department initiated weed management activities in public fishing waters more than 25 years ago. Those activities focused entirely on harvest and biomass reduction and not on prevention.

Some limited activity has been undertaken in partnership with other agencies to eradicate or control invasive weeds, including response to hydrilla infestations and detection of giant salvinia on the Colorado River. Activities for species within the department's statutory authority have focused on more conservative importation standards for aquatic animals (an authority shared with the Arizona Department of Agriculture), restriction on importation and movement of crayfishes, and increased focus on informing the public about aquatic nuisance species.

**Communications:** Communications with the public were not consistent regarding aquatic nuisance species, nor were they a principal marketing message carried by the department. Outreach prior to 2000 was limited to minor messages in fishing regulations guides. Since 2000, the department has incorporated a variety of outreach methods and tools to convey messages to the public.

## II. Summary of approach

In an effort to improve our communications and outreach to the public, the department (with the guidance of the IAFWA pilot project) identified key focal species and pathways for introduction or spread through Arizona. Having identified those species and pathways, selected issues and audiences were prioritized and messages brainstormed to convey the issue to those target audiences. We identified potential stakeholders that could assist in conveying messages. Our outreach goals are to:

1. Increase awareness among the many public sector and private user groups.
2. Increase ANS prevention routine actions of resource user groups and commercial suppliers.
3. Develop a program to provide information on:
  - a. why the spread of ANS populations needs to be limited.
  - b. how the ANS populations can be reduced.
  - c. the value of a healthy aquatic ecosystem.
4. Use communication strategies to strengthen support from the public and private sectors for and statewide participation in ANS management strategies.
5. Formulate messages that recognize the existence of multiple cultures and language groups in Arizona.
6. Develop linkages with the public as a frontline for ANS monitoring.
7. Formalize the ANS interagency group and work towards completion of the draft Arizona ANS Management Plan.

**Target audiences:** Highest priority target audiences were selected based upon our ability to reach them directly as customers; their ability to directly influence Arizona policy or approaches to aquatic nuisance species; and their connection to high likelihood conveyance pathways. Hence, we focused upon boaters, boating anglers, policy makers (internal and external), and irrigators.

**Funding:** Funding was limited, and the majority of activities were undertaken through existing outreach and management programs (license revenues, boating registration revenues, and Sport Fish Restoration). More recently (2006, 2007), specific funding was acquired to increase our capabilities to plan for and address invasive species. These funds are derived from the Arizona Wildlife Conservation Funds, derived from tribal gaming revenues shared with the State of Arizona and dedicated to wildlife conservation activity.

### III. Outcomes of the pilot project actions

Only a few of the actions identified in our communication strategy have thus far been implemented. It is our intention to continue implementation of that strategy.

**Arizona Invasive Species Advisory Council:** During the course of development of the communication strategy, our attention turned to development of an Arizona Invasive Species Advisory Council. The council is intended to provide guidance to the state of Arizona for development of policy approach to address the invasive species issue.

On April 1, 2005, Governor Janet Napolitano signed an executive order creating the Arizona Invasive Species Advisory Council under the leadership of the Arizona Game and Fish Department and the Arizona Department of Agriculture. This council will further shape outreach and communications approaches taken by the state and department. This action on the part of the governor is, in part, attributable to the communication strategy and focus developed through this project.

**Communications strategies:** Several communication strategies were implemented, enhanced, or are in development as a result of this project. These include:

- Enhanced outreach to anglers through publication of the state Fishing Regulations Guide with a focus section on aquatic nuisance species.
- Enhanced outreach to boaters through inclusion of an aquatic nuisances species module in boater education programs.
- Enhanced outreach to water resources stakeholders through the Arizona Invasive Species Council (including partnership with the Arizona Department of Water Resources and the Salt River Project).
- Enhanced “Stop Aquatic Hitchhikers ©” signage at Arizona lakes and waterways.
- Enhanced signage associated with harmful algal blooms at selected Arizona lakes focused on best practices for boaters.

**Staffing:** As a result of the focus on Aquatic Nuisance Species through this project, the department has detailed an individual to focus their time and attention on invasive species. Currently much of that focus is directed toward the Arizona Invasive Species Council; however it is envisioned that this position will further implement the communication strategies identified through this project. The long-term dedication of personnel to this function is uncertain.

### IV. Project highlights and recommendations

**Prudent change in focus:** Our determination to implement the communication strategy was interrupted by the focus on a broader approach to invasive species within our state. This interruption was likely prudent -- the opportunity to raise the attention level for invasive species and develop a stakeholder-based approach to state policy development could not be ignored. It is, however, only an interruption, and attention can return to implementation of our communications strategy as a component of that broader policy.

**Importance of dedicated staff:** The lack of a position dedicated to implementation of aquatic nuisance species strategies is significant impediment to success. Most of the roles in our fisheries management and outreach areas are tightly focused, and addition of aquatic nuisance species roles to existing functions ultimately resulted in dedication of only a small proportion of time to the issue.

A position dedicated to implementation of aquatic nuisance species or invasive species activities allows for programmatic focus and attention to the issue. Hence, we have not been able to take full advantage of the opportunity presented through this project thus far. We envision being better positioned now, as the project is ending, to better implement the communication strategy as currently drafted.

**Refining messages:** Developing and deploying an effective message is an area that we need to continue to refine. It is our opinion that focusing on repetitive negative messages is not appealing to public information or marketing leadership. Successful messages are those that can both convey useful information to the public and that can give them positive actions that they can undertake.