



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Fish & Wildlife Management Assistance

Aquatic Nuisance Species

What is the Problem?

Aquatic nuisance species are causing significant economic and ecological problems throughout North America. Invasive nonnative plants and animals transform our natural areas, damage our crops, and threaten native species. Today, over 50,000 nonnative species are established in the United States, and control costs have spiraled to more than \$100 billion annually.

Aquatic nuisance species have been arriving in the United States for a long time. Some were intentionally released or escaped from captivity. Others came as hitchhikers on commodities like produce and nursery stock. Many arrived as silent stowaways aboard ships, or aircraft. Some nonnative aquatic species have beneficial uses and are actively managed; these are not considered “invasive.” Some are simply benign. Others cause serious and irreversible harm to ecosystems when they multiply and spread rapidly due to lack of natural controls.

What are we doing?

The U.S. Congress directed the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to address invasive species problems in the *Nonindigenous Aquatic Nuisance Prevention and Control Act of 1990*. The Service quickly responded by developing the Aquatic Nuisance Species Program in 1991.

The Fish and Wildlife Management Assistance program has an important role in managing aquatic nuisance

species and their impacts. For example, seven biologists serve as Regional Aquatic Nuisance Species Coordinators who provide national leadership by increasing public awareness of invasive species; orchestrating invasive species management activities with other Federal, State, and private entities; providing technical assistance to control invasive species on Federal lands; and coordinating and conducting studies to determine ways to eliminate or control the effects of invasive species.

Public awareness about invasive species remains one of the highest priorities of the Service’s Aquatic Nuisance Species Program. If the introduction or spread of invasive species is prevented by informed people, then efforts to control or eradicate invasive species will require fewer resources and efforts.



Zebra mussels clogging a pipe (top), round goby (left), Asian swamp eel (right), Chinese mitten crab (below)



One of our primary outreach efforts is the 100th Meridian Initiative. We work with numerous States, Federal agencies, Canada, and the private sector to inform the public about the potentially severe effects of moving boats from infested waters to “clean, healthy” waters. The Service and cooperators inspect boats and trailers before they cross the 100th Meridian from eastern to western North America. These efforts help prevent the spread of zebra mussels and other invasive species.

One of our most successful control programs is the Ruffe Control Program. Since 1992, our offices on the Great Lakes have led coordinated efforts to prevent the spread of ruffe, an invasive fish from Europe. Public education, field monitoring, and voluntary measures by the maritime industry have been keys to this successful program, which has prevented range expansion since



Monitoring the spread of zebra mussels helps control efforts.



Ballast water released from ocean freighters is an important vector for invasive species introductions.

1995.

The Fish and Wildlife Management Assistance program also investigates invasive species for which little is known. For example, round gobies, another invasive fish from Europe, compete with native fishes in the Great Lakes for food and space. We are studying their behavior and diet to determine the most effective method to prevent their spread. We are also developing methods to save native mussel species that are threatened with extinction by the proliferation of zebra mussels.

Aquatic Nuisance Species coordinators and Fish and Wildlife Management Assistance biologists help combat the negative impacts of invasive species. They raise public awareness and coordinate efforts to control the introduction and spread of invasive species. These efforts will help restore and maintain the health of the Nation’s fish and wildlife resources.

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Branch of Fish & Wildlife Management
Assistance
703/358 - 1718
<http://fisheries.fws.gov/FWSMA/mamain.htm>

November 2000