

# Habitattitude™

## A National Public Awareness and Partnership Campaign Promoting Responsible Consumer Behaviors While Limiting the Spread of Potential Aquatic Invasive Species

### Background

As part of its responsibilities to effectively address the growing challenge of invasive species, the Fish and Wildlife Service staffs the national Aquatic Nuisance Species (ANS) Task Force. In response to Great Lakes' zebra mussel impacts, Congress created this Task Force via the Nonindigenous Prevention and Control Act of 1990 to coordinate prevention, control and eradication efforts between federal and state agencies and the private sector.

The Task Force identified a lack of public awareness as a major obstacle to address this issue. As a result, the Fish and Wildlife Service hired an Outreach Coordinator for the Task Force. Shortly afterwards, the Outreach Coordinator elevated social marketing as an effective way to conduct outreach for aquatic invasive species and positioned the Fish and Wildlife Service as a national leader.

### What is Habitattitude™?

Habitattitude™ is the second major national initiative developed by the ANS Task Force and its partner organizations. While the Service is the lead agency for both initiatives, there are some very distinct differences between the two. Stop Aquatic Hitchhikers! is the first campaign and is one of attraction that was designed to educate recreational users of our aquatic resources about invasive species. This campaign has successfully leveraged the outreach capacity of multiple partner organizations; currently, 125 private, nonprofit and public sector organizations from local, state, regional and national levels have engaged in the campaign to help spread its prevention message.

While Habitattitude™ is a similar targeted effort, it is directed at a different audience and it has the

significant support and involvement of two different, but related sectors; the pet and aquarium trade and the nursery and landscape industry. In fact, this involvement is what will make this campaign successful.



By integrating the campaign's prevention messages and cooperative marketing materials into retail store displays, manufacturers' packaging and coverage in hobbyist magazines, the campaign partners plan on exposing millions of hobbyists to the campaign brand and directing them to the campaign web site for more prevention tips.

Because Habitattitude™ addresses multiple aspects of the growing aquatic invasive species issue, this makes it the perfect vehicle to bring relevance and attention to the issue. By targeting aquarium consumers and water gardeners to raise their awareness about and seek their ownership for this issue, the campaign partners plan to create a groundswell of awareness and support for responsible hobbyist behaviors.

The campaign's information will empower the audience to take action and become part of the solution in preventing the spread of aquatic invasive species through their activities. Additionally, Habitattitude™ aims to unite federal and state agencies with industry to show how resource-dependent industries can work collaboratively with the government to address complex environmental issues.

Using a Task Force to convene partners at a national level, Habitattitude™ was developed collaboratively by the Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council, the Fish and Wildlife Service, state fish and wildlife agencies and NOAA's Sea Grant College Program. The campaign focuses around promoting various alternatives to releasing

ornamental fish and aquatic plants into our environment. The campaign translates a complex issue into a simple format of a themed brand that has a distinct visual identity and a strong call to action. As focal point, this brand directs the audience to specific information and provides conservation and environmental interests and related industries with a way to make this issue relevant to aquarium consumers and water gardeners.

### **Why target aquarium consumers and water gardeners?**

Americans love their free time and many spend it enjoying some aspect of our natural world. While most people think of the outdoors when experiencing nature, many millions think about bringing nature into their homes with aquaria and outdoor water gardens. In fact, over 13 million homes have aquaria or water gardens and these hobbies support tens of thousands of jobs and generate \$1 billion plus for our economy. When viewed separately, these activities contribute positively to our society. However, when combined with a lack of environmental awareness and no model behaviors to guide peoples' enjoyment of these activities, the impacts of released aquatic plants and fish could create an expensive problem for the associated industries and taxpayers alike.

Research has identified aquariums and water gardens as sources for potential aquatic invasive species. To promote prevention behaviors by offering sanctioned alternatives to release, the partners want to raise awareness about responsible hobbyist behaviors and limit the spread of potential aquatic invasive species from home aquaria and outdoor ponds. These alternatives to release are the foundation for the Habitattitude™ campaign.

### **How can I participate in the campaign?**

Habitattitude™ encourages multiple levels of participation, ranging from students to federal agencies. For a student or individual, the best ways to participate is to learn about the issue and responsible hobbyist behaviors. The campaign provides a fantastic resource in the form of a web site; the address is:

[www.habitattitude.net](http://www.habitattitude.net)

Federal and state agencies and any organization that values healthy aquatic resources may participate by becoming a formal Habitattitude™ partner. In the development phase, careful

attention was paid to positioning Habitattitude™ as a vehicle that multiple partners can support. This was done in an effort to leverage the government, industry and hobbyist clubs' collective abilities to raise awareness about this growing problem and to promote prevention. By becoming a partner, your organization can access different cooperative marketing materials, multiple versions of the Habitattitude™ brand and up-to-date information about the campaign, how aquatic invasive species issue is affecting different parts of the country and what is being done to address it.

When developing Habitattitude™, the partners made several strategic decisions to enhance the campaign's effectiveness. The first was to unify those parties interested in promoting prevention. We designed customizable campaign materials for agencies, retail outlets and hobbyist clubs that wish to become partners. This was done to expand ownership so you could put your organizational logo next to the brand.

The second decision addressed ownership on a different level and affected the web site. As you can see, it is not a "dot.gov" site. During our informal research, we found that people felt alienated by our technical terminology and use of acronyms to describe the issue. It confused them and did not make the issue relevant in terms they could understand. Subsequently, they concluded that their actions would not matter, and only government could address this expanding problem.

### **How will the Partners evaluate this campaign?**

Evaluation is the key to Habitattitude™. Accountability for using taxpayer and industry dollars is very important. Using funding from NOAA's National Sea Grant funding competition, the partners will step down and evaluate the campaign at the state level. Modeled after Stop Aquatic Hitchhikers! we will use similar methodologies to evaluate Habitattitude™ in Minnesota and Pennsylvania.

### **For more information, contact:**

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, DEQ, Branch of Invasive Species, 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Suite 840 Arlington, VA 22203, 703/358-2148

