

# MODEL PROCESS: RAPID RESPONSE FUND FOR AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Aquatic invasive species (AIS, also known as aquatic nuisance species or ANS) may reside within fresh, estuarine, or marine waters and are defined by the Nonindigenous Aquatic Nuisance Prevention and Control Act of 1990 as “nonindigenous species that threaten native species; the ecological stability of infested waters; or the commercial, agricultural, recreational, or other activities dependent upon those waters.” Unchecked, AIS have the potential to imperil public health and transform ecosystems, resulting in widespread environmental degradation. AIS also threaten sectors of the Nation’s economy that depend upon natural resources and native ecosystems. Aquaculture, tourism, recreation, shipping, and water resource infrastructure, including hydropower facilities, may be adversely impacted by AIS. Although prevention is the most effective approach to eliminate or reduce the threat of invasive species, Early Detection and Rapid Response (EDRR) serves as a failsafe when prevention measures are ineffective or unavailable.

Once a new non-native species is detected, there often is only a short window of opportunity to eradicate or contain the species. Recognizing the importance of timely action, the Department of the Interior (DOI or the Department) in coordination with federal agencies, states, tribes, territories, and other partners published “Safeguarding America’s Lands and Waters from Invasive Species – A National Framework for Early Detection and Rapid Response” in 2016. This report called for a focus on coordination and partnerships, science and technology, and strategic on-the-ground actions to detect invasive species that pose the greatest risk and swiftly respond to eradicate them before they establish, spread, and cause adverse impacts. Federal departments and agencies, the National Invasive Species Council, the Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force (ANSTF), states, tribes, and other partners continue to call for implementation of a National EDRR Framework and are taking steps to coordinate its operation.

In 2021, Congress passed the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), a historic investment in the conservation and stewardship of America’s public lands that will lead to better outdoor spaces and habitats for people and wildlife for generations. The BIL authorized \$905 million for ecosystem restoration over five years (2022-2026) including \$100 million to DOI for “invasive species detection, prevention, and eradication, including conducting research and providing resources to facilitate detection of invasive species at points of entry and awarding grants for eradication of invasive species on non-federal land and on federal land.”

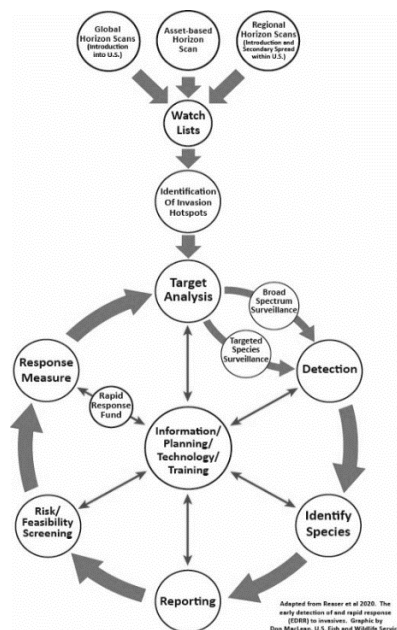
As part of strategically implementing BIL investments, DOI identified advancing a National EDRR Framework (Figure 1) as a priority for funding and took steps to invest in supporting some of the institutional components of such a framework. To that end, DOI is working with partners to identify, enhance, and collaborate on EDRR activities, build new tools, and support coordinated processes to proactively find and eradicate new invasive species before they establish, spread, and cause harm. Specifics include identifying high-risk invasive species and invasion hotspots across the nation to inform early detection efforts, developing molecular tools to aid detection capabilities, expanding capacity for on-the-ground rapid response actions, including the establishment of a pilot Rapid Response Fund for aquatic invasive species, and creating an online clearinghouse where managers can share current information to guide implementation.

With respect to a Rapid Response Fund, there is a need for readily available financial resources to assess and support response actions for quick containment or eradication of newly detected species. A Rapid Response Fund is a critical component of a National EDRR Framework to ensure timely and more effective responses to invasive species, thus avoiding costly long-term and widespread control efforts.

DOI’s BIL investments for Fiscal Year 2023 includes \$1 million to establish a pilot Rapid Response Fund for AIS with an additional \$1 million envisioned each year in Fiscal Years 2024 through 2026. This is further supported by the Fiscal Year 2024 President's Budget that builds on DOI’s BIL investments to operationalize a National EDRR Framework and proposes contributing \$2.6 million to support the Rapid Response Fund. The Rapid Response Fund will be administered within the existing authorities of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Fish and Aquatic Conservation program, to be coordinated through the ANSTF. Established by the Nonindigenous Aquatic Nuisance Prevention and Control Act of 1990, the ANSTF has the responsibility to protect the waters of the United States and has created a unified network that raises awareness and takes action to prevent and manage AIS. Co-chaired by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the ANSTF consists of Federal agency representatives and ex-officio representatives that work in conjunction with six regional panels and issue-specific subcommittees to coordinate efforts related to AIS across the Nation. Accordingly, the ANSTF is well positioned to coordinate and successfully operate a response rapid fund for AIS. In anticipation of funding, the ANSTF established a Rapid Response Fund Working Group to develop a model approach for the operation of the fund using the considerations outlined in the National Invasive Species Council’s 2022 paper [“Federal Invasive Species Rapid Response Fund: Criteria and Considerations for Establishment.”](#)

The Model Process: Rapid Response Fund for Aquatic Invasive Species is a product of the Working Group and outlines a structure and process for a pilot Rapid Response Fund for AIS. It defines circumstances and activities that qualify for funding and addresses eligibility of applicants, application process, evaluation criteria, expectations on desired outcomes, and the relationship of those activities to the National EDRR Framework. The document was presented to the ANSTF on January 12, 2023. Afterwards, it was distributed to the ANSTF members and regional panels for a formal comment period. The working group reconvened in Spring 2023 to review the comments and address comments as appropriate. A final draft was submitted to the ANSTF for approval during its July 2023 meeting. The Model Process was approved by the ANSTF on July 19, 2023. The document will be reviewed on an annual basis. Any proposed changes will be submitted to the ANSTF for discussion and approval.

**FIGURE 1: COMPONENTS OF THE NATIONAL EARLY DETECTION RAPID RESPONSE FRAMEWORK**



## **2. SCOPE OF THE RAPID RESPONSE FUND**

### ***2.A. RAPID RESPONSE DEFINED***

Rapid Response involves several ongoing and sequential activities including assessment of the situation, deployment of response actions, follow-up monitoring, and restoration. For the purposes of this Fund, “Rapid Response” is defined as a process employed to eradicate the founding population of a non-native, potentially invasive, species in a specific location before that species begins to reproduce or spreads so widely that eradication is no longer feasible. This process includes assessment of the threat of a new species detection, delineation of the extent of infestation, evaluation of potential response measures, attempts to remove all individuals from the targeted location, and evaluation of the response efficacy. The term “rapid” means the process will be conducted in an expedited, effective, and cost-efficient manner.

### ***2.B. ELIGIBLE TAXA***

Funds may be used to respond to aquatic invasive species (AIS), as defined herein. Responses to species for which the origin or native range are unknown are eligible for funding if there is evidence that they have not been previously detected in the area and their presence may result in adverse impacts. At this time, pathogens (e.g., bacteria, virus, fungi, and parasites) as well as harmful algal blooms (HAB) at risk of invading or spreading within the United States and U.S. territories or that hitchhike on other organisms are not eligible for funding under this model process, as effectively responding to these organisms often requires action and resources that are beyond the scope of this pilot fund.

Watch lists are a key component of the National EDRR Framework and are used to prioritize species for surveillance, reporting, or response to reduce the risk of impact. Watch lists, or similar prioritization documents, may exist at national, regional, state, tribal, territorial, and local levels. Although funding is not limited to “watch list species”, the presence of a species on a watch list will be considered in the evaluation process to ensure funding is awarded to efforts that target species with a high probability to cause harm.

### ***2.C. ELIGIBLE LOCATIONS***

Rapid Response funding may be used to respond to a new species introduction within freshwater, estuarine, wetland, or marine waters of the United States or U.S. territories. Funding may also be used for range expansions by existing populations of AIS into areas within the United States or U.S. territories where the species has not been previously detected. For response efforts directed towards range expansions of species with existing populations in the United States or U.S. territories, priority will be given to incipient populations that are either a secondary invasion, were introduced a significant distance away from an existing population (e.g., introduction into a new watershed), or pose a new threat to vulnerable, high priority, or protected areas.

### ***2.D. ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS***

For Rapid Response funds, eligible entities are limited to federal and state agencies, U.S. territories agencies, interstate organizations, and Federally recognized Indian Tribal Governments and Native American Organizations authorized by Indian tribal governments (as identified within the Federal Register Notice “[Indian Entities Recognized by and Eligible To Receive Services From the United States Bureau of Indian Affairs](#)”). These entities were selected as they generally lead AIS response efforts, have the responsible jurisdictional authority on their own lands, and exhibit the capacity and ability to conduct the response in a rapid manner. These entities may collaborate with and provide

subawards to non-eligible entities to assist with the response; such entities may include local governments, institutions of higher learning, and non-governmental organizations.

### **2.E. ELIGIBLE ACTIVITIES**

It is expected that prior to applying to the Rapid Response Fund, the identification of the targeted species has been confirmed and there is evidence that the species is likely to significantly impact the environment, economy, cultural resources, and/or human, plant, or animal health. Accordingly, actions to confirm species identification or conduct a risk evaluation are not supported by this fund.

In most circumstances, the management goal of projects submitted for consideration should be eradication of the targeted species from the defined location. As such, eligible activities for the Rapid Response Fund are those that support or lead up to achieving this goal, including:

- Planning and site delineation:
  - Delineation to determine the spatial extent and abundance of an isolated AIS population.
  - Analysis and assessment of potential response measures.
  - Planning, environmental documentation and/or permit acquisition.
  - Measures to contain the population during the species assessment or while a long-term response plan is formulated.
- Deployment of response action:
  - Implement actions on site that support or lead up to eradication of the targeted species.
  - Survey surrounding areas.
  - Monitor the population and effectiveness of applied response measures.
- Potential applicants should also take note of the following:
  - Funding requests may include salary costs as well as costs of supplies, equipment, construction, and services, provided those costs are consistent with [2 CFR §200.318](#).
  - Under some circumstances, proposals selected for funding may be eligible for reimbursement for pre-award activities. More detail is provided in 3.c. “Terms and Conditions” below.
  - Assessment funding for preliminary response actions is allowable in circumstances where a full response plan has not yet been developed and/or the precise geographic scope of the targeted species is unknown. Assessment funding may be awarded through this fund to assess potential response measures to determine the most effective response plan. Once the full response plan has been determined, applicants that received assessment funding may seek additional funding for deployment of the response by submitting an updated narrative and budget before the end of their award period.
  - Funds cannot be used for long-term management, monitoring, or remediation.
  - The project period for Rapid Response Fund awards shall not exceed three years. Awardees that do not achieve the management goal within three-years may apply for additional funding. Such awardees must describe the results achieved with the previous funding and the expected accomplishments to be achieved by the project extension.

### **2.F. ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS**

To be eligible for Rapid Response Funding:

- Prior to submitting a proposal, the identity of the targeted species must be confirmed and reported to the U.S Geological Survey Nonindigenous Aquatic Species Database (<https://nas.er.usgs.gov>).

- The applicant must have a general understanding of the infestation; however, a full delineation is not required, and this action can be requested as a component of the proposal to inform response efforts.
- The applicant must present evidence that the species is likely to significantly impact the environment, economy, cultural resources, and/or human, plant, or animal health in an area within the United States or its territories.
- The applicant must either have an existing Rapid Response Plan that is suitable to the situation or agree that a Rapid Response Plan will be completed within 60 days from the date of award using the ANSTF Rapid Response Template and Guidance document. (Note: This template is currently under development by the ANSTF EDRR Subcommittee, and is expected to be completed early 2024. Should an applicant need to develop a RR plan before this document is finalized, the Review Team will identify alternative guidance to assist plan development.)

### **3. AWARD MECHANISM AND TIMING**

#### ***3.A. AWARD TYPE***

Rapid Response funding will be awarded quarterly through a discretionary competitive funding opportunity. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will post a Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) to Grants.gov, on behalf of the ANSTF per Departmental policy. Applicants may apply electronically through GrantSolutions.gov. The Rapid Response Fund Coordinator (see below) will serve as the Program Officer for the Rapid Response funding opportunity. The Program Officer shall ensure proposals are eligible and complete before sending for review by the Rapid Response Fund Review Team (see below); create a funding memo for selected applicants; manage and monitor the award through its lifecycle; and serve as the primary point of contact for award recipients.

#### ***3.B. AWARD CYCLE***

A NOFO will be posted to Grants.gov.; after which the Rapid Response Fund Review Team will review and select projects for funding on a quarterly basis. This timing was set up to allow for timely response to new species threats, while maintaining a fair, competitive, and transparent process.

The intent is to post one NOFO to Grants.gov per year, but the NOFO may be updated and reposted as needed. Quarterly cycles are anticipated to start February 1, May 1, August 1, and November 1. Deadlines for submission will occur 60 days after the quarterly start date (April 1, June 30, September 30, and December 31). Review Teams will be able to evaluate proposals as they are submitted but will not make any funding decisions until the end of the quarterly cycle.

Prior to posting, the quarterly NOFO will be updated with the amount of funding remaining for the fiscal year. This is to ensure applicants construct a budget that is feasible to fund. If funds are depleted before the end of the year, posting of the NOFOs will be paused until funds are replenished. Needed funding amounts are difficult to predict. The Rapid Response Review Team will be mindful of funding choices in the first quarters to ensure funding can be stretched across the year to the greatest extent possible. If proposals are determined to be lower priority, the Review Team may choose not to fund the proposal during the quarter it was submitted. It may instead inform the applicant of the decision and encourage re-submission of the proposal during the last quarterly cycle of the fiscal year if funds remain.

### **3.C. TERMS AND CONDITIONS**

#### **3.C.1. Cost Share and Matching**

The Rapid Response Fund will not have a cost share or match requirement, although additional contribution of funds or in-kind contributions will be considered favorably in the evaluation of proposals.

#### **3.C.2. Post –Response actions and success**

Following project completion, successful applicants will agree to complete an annual survey to track the success of projects funded by the Rapid Response Fund over time. The survey will inquire about any post-rapid response activities taken and the sustainability of the management goals achieved by the project.

#### **3.C.3. Pre-Award Conditions**

In addition to the [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service General Award Terms and Conditions](#) (e.g., administrative requirements, cost principles, and audit requirements) and Mandatory Disclosures (e.g., conflict of interest, lobbying), applicants selected for funding may be eligible for Pre-Award Costs, with conditions included in the Notice of Award letter. Pre-award costs are those that incurred no more than 90 days prior to the effective date of the award directly pursuant to the award start date and in anticipation of the award where such costs are necessary for efficient and timely performance of the scope of work.

To qualify for pre-award cost reimbursement, an applicant must provide a list of actions and associated cost of the pre-award activities. The applicant must also demonstrate in the application that the pre-award activities were necessary and reasonable for accomplishing the overall program objectives and would have been approved had they occurred within the project period. *If the proposal is selected for funding*, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will review the activities and identify those activities that are eligible for reimbursement in the Notice of Award. Pre-award costs will not be approved for any work that requires completion of environmental compliance first. All costs incurred before the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service makes the award are at the recipient's risk. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is not required to reimburse pre-award activities if, for any reason, the applicant is not selected for funding or if the Federal award is less than anticipated or inadequate to cover such costs. Until pre-award costs are authorized under an approved award, the applicant has no assurance that costs will be reimbursed.

## **4. APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION**

### **4.A. APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS**

To apply for the Rapid Response Fund, applicants must provide a complete project abstract summary, project narrative, and budget narrative as well as all applicable forms listed below. While drafting these components, please note:

- The applicant must clearly articulate the management goal within the project narrative. In most circumstances, the goal should be eradication of the targeted species from the defined location.
- The project narrative must also include a statement that describes, and provides evidence for, the level of confidence in accomplishing the management goal. In doing so the applicant should address:

- The size and spatial extent of the target population and the certainty of those factors,
  - The connectivity of the waterbody containing the target population to other waters,
  - The long-term survival, fecundity, and dispersive capabilities of the target species,
  - The difficulty of finding all individuals in the target population or effectively exposing them to the control method, and
  - The effectiveness of the response measures applied.
- The applicant must indicate its ability to ensure all environmental compliance reviews and permitting requirements are completed prior to implementing response measures.
  - The applicant should also demonstrate a commitment to conduct post-rapid response activities. Such activities are not eligible for funding from the Rapid Response Fund but will be considered in the evaluation process. Such activities may include:
    - Restoration and mitigation measures for any adverse impacts from the response measures,
    - Long-term post-response surveys or monitoring, and
    - Biosecurity protocols or measures to prevent any re-invasion of the site.

**4.B. PROJECT ABSTRACT SUMMARY**

Applicants must complete and submit the Project Abstract Summary form. The Project Abstract Summary form must provide a brief award description in plain language that the public can understand without viewing the full proposal. It should include a brief, simple description of the project purpose, activities to be performed, deliverables and expected outcomes, intended beneficiaries, and sub recipient activities, if known at the time of submission.

**4.C. PROJECT NARRATIVE**

Each proposal should use the template below to explain the need, scope, and proposed actions of the response. The project narrative should not exceed 12 pages (excluding resumes, references, applicant’s Rapid Response Plan, species risk assessment, or watch list documentation, information to support environmental compliance review requirements, or additional supplemental information).

**4.C.1. Agency or Organization applying for funds:**

**4.C.2. Point of Contact:**

- Provide the contact information (name, affiliation, address, phone, and email) for at least one person who can answer questions regarding the application.

**4.C.3. Species Description:**

- State the AIS that will be the focus of the response, including how the species confirmation was made.
- Describe the potential and known impacts of the targeted species, including environmental, economic, cultural, and health impacts. Include citations, as appropriate. If a formal species risk assessment has been performed, attach it to the proposal. Novel species where potential impact is uncertain should include a statement reinforcing the degree of concern and, if applicable, reference similar species with an invasion history.
- Identify any watch lists, or similar prioritization tools, that identify the targeted species.
- Describe the invasion history of the species.



#### **4.C.4. Location Description**

- State the precise location where the species was found and the date and manner by which the species was detected.
- If known, state the method of introduction.
- If known, state the size (e.g., acres, miles) or percentage of the area infested.
- Describe the location where the targeted species was detected, including characteristics of the location that may facilitate survival and potential range expansion of the targeted species and characteristics that may impact the ability to effectively respond.

#### **4.C.5. Rapid Response Plans**

- If a rapid response Plan exists, describe how it will be used for this project. Attach the rapid response Plan to this proposal.
- If a rapid response Plan does not exist, state the intent and timeline to complete a rapid response Plan using the ANSTF Rapid Response Template and Guidance document.

#### **4.C.6. Management Goal and Objectives:**

- Clearly articulate the management goal of the proposed project in terms that are specific and quantified.
- List project objectives. Objectives are meant to be realistic targets or benchmarks that, if achieved, will accomplish the management goal.
- Provide a statement that describes, and provides evidence for, the level of confidence in accomplishing the management goal, noting any challenges or barriers that may hinder success.

#### **4.C.7. Description of entity(ies) undertaking the project:**

- Describe the organization proposing to conduct the project, expressing the specific skills, experience, and capacity related to tasks to be performed.
- If applicable, describe how the applicant has coordinated with other relevant organizations or individuals in planning the project, and detail if/how they will be involved in the response.

#### **4.C.8. Approach or Treatment Options:**

- Describe the specific conservation actions or efforts necessary to accomplish the management goal and objectives.
- Describe the work that will be performed to achieve each objective.
- Demonstrate that the applicant will use sound design, appropriate procedures, and accepted conservation or management principles.
- Include contingency plans to address unexpected events or situations that may occur.
- Describe any connection this project has to broader management or funding efforts.
- Note any actions to be taken to protect non-target species.
- If applicable, include any information to support environmental compliance review requirements:
  - National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) – provide any information that may be relevant to compliance with NEPA.
  - Endangered Species Act (ESA) – provide any information that may be relevant to compliance with the ESA.
  - Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) – provide any information that may be relevant to compliance with the MMPA.
  - National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) – provide any information that may be relevant to compliance with NHPA, such as locations of historic or cultural properties.

- Other Permits and Consultations – list and provide the status of any other state and federal requirements.

*4.C.8.a. If the proposal is only for preliminary response or assessment actions (e.g., formulate a Rapid Response Plan, site delineation):*

- Provide an analysis and assessment of the treatment options being considered, including any environmental documentation and/or permit acquisition that will be required.
- Describe any measures taken to contain the population while assessment activities are being conducted.

*4.C.8.b. If the project previously received funding from this Rapid Response Fund and awardee is re-applying for additional funds:*

- Describe what actions were taken with the previous funding and what was achieved.
- State why additional funds are needed and what will be accomplished by extending the length of the project.

**4.C.9. Timeline:**

- State the estimated start and end dates of activities for which funds are being requested. Project duration must not exceed three years.
- Describe significant milestones in completing the project and any accomplishments to date.

**4.C.10. Commitment for post-rapid response activities:**

- Describe actions that will be taken after the response measures have been completed, this may include restoration and mitigation measures for any off-target adverse impacts from control measures, follow-up surveys or monitoring, and/or biosecurity protocols or measures to prevent any re-invasion of the site.
- Identify the entity or person responsible for conducting these activities and any funding commitments.

**4.C.11. Supplemental information (optional):**

- May include letters of support, declarations of emergency, graphics, maps, citations, etc.

**4.D. BUDGET NARRATIVE**

Applicants must include a budget narrative that describes and justifies requested budget items and costs. In the budget narrative, describe how the [SF-424 Budget](#) Information, “Object Class Category” totals were determined.

- For salary costs, generally describe how estimates were determined by identifying what type of staff will support the project and how much time they will contribute to the project (in hours or workdays).
- Describe any proposed items of cost that require prior approval under the Federal award cost principles, including any anticipated subaward, transfer, or contracting work under the award.
- Provide a separate description and total estimated costs for both contractual and subaward costs.
- If equipment previously purchased with Federal funds is available for the project, provide a list of that equipment and identify the Federal funding source.

- Identify any third-party cash or in-kind contributions that a partner or other entity will contribute to the project and describe how the contributions directly and substantively benefit completion of the project.
- For in-kind contributions, identify the source, the amount, and the valuation methodology used to determine the total value. See 2 CFR §200.306 for more information.
- If reimbursement of pre-award costs were requested, describe the pre-award activities and associated costs and why they were necessary. Until pre-award costs are authorized under an approved award, the applicant has no assurance that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will reimburse these costs.

If assessment funds are being requested for preliminary response work (e.g., delineation, assessment of response measures), a revised budget narrative will be required after the initial award is made to approve additional funding to implement the response plan once it is determined.

#### **4.E. OTHER REQUIRED FORMS AND DOCUMENTATION**

- All applicants must submit the Standard Form SF-424, Application for Federal Assistance. This form is available with the announcement on Grants.gov and in GrantSolutions.gov. The form must be complete and signed by an Authorized Representative of the applicant.
- All applicants must submit either the SF-424A, Budget Information for Non-Construction Programs or SF-424C, Budget Information for Construction Program.
- Applicants seeking approval to acquire real property under an award must complete and submit the SF-429, “Real Property Status Report (Cover Page)” and the SF-429-B, “Real Property Status Report Attachment B (Request to Acquire, Improve, or Furnish)”. These forms are required if the real property is acquired with Federal funds, with recipient cost share or matching funds, or as an in-kind contribution under the award.
- Per the Financial Assistance Interior Regulation (FAIR), 2 CFR §1402.112, applicants must state in their application if any actual or potential conflict of interest exists at the time of submission.
- All U.S. states, local governments, Indian tribes, institutions of higher education, and non-profit organizations expending \$750,000 or more in Federal award funds in the applicant’s fiscal year must submit a Single Audit report for that year through the Federal Audit Clearinghouse’s Internet Data Entry System, in accordance with 2 CFR Part 200 subpart F.
- Applicants requesting more than \$100,000 in federal funding must certify to the statements in 43 CFR Part 18, Appendix A-Certification Regarding Lobbying. Applicants and recipients must complete and submit the SF-LLL, “Disclosure of Lobbying Activities” form if the Federal share of the proposal or award is more than \$100,000 and the applicant or recipient has made or has agreed to make any payment using non-appropriated funds for lobbying in connection with the application or award.
- Applicants must provide a statement indicating if there is any overlap between this Federal application and any other Federal application, or funded project, regarding activities, costs, or time commitment of key personnel.

## **5. APPLICATION REVIEW INFORMATION**

### **5.A. RAPID RESPONSE FUND COORDINATOR**

Organizing quarterly reviews and overseeing the award process will be a significant workload. Accordingly, it is recommended that a portion of the Rapid Response funding be used to support a

staff position to manage and coordinate this grant program. The Rapid Response Fund Coordinator will:

- Compose the quarterly Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) and oversee the process for its publication on Grants.gov.
- Serve as a point of contact for potential applicants with questions about the NOFO components or submitting applications into Grant Solutions.
- Conduct an intake review of all incoming proposals to ensure eligibility.
- Manage any negotiations on the budget or scope of work between potential applicants and the Review Team.
- Establish and coordinate the quarterly Review Teams and communicate all recommendations to the ANSTF.
- Notify all applicants of funding decisions.
- Serve as Project Officer of all awarded projects through the duration of the grant period of performance.
- Review and approve all interim and final reports, returning any incomplete or unclear reports to the awardee within a reasonable time for correction.
- Compile and categorize all project reports to help inform future Rapid Response efforts, making a summary of that information available.
- Annually survey past award recipients to inquire about post-rapid response activities taken and the sustainability of the management goals achieved by the project.

***5.B. RAPID RESPONSE FUND REVIEW TEAM***

Following the conclusion of each quarterly cycle, the Rapid Respond Fund Coordinator will establish a Rapid Response Review Team to evaluate each of the received proposals. Each member will need to review and sign the conflict-of-interest disclosure. If a conflict-of-interest is identified that may impair the individual’s objectivity or create an unfair competitive advantage for any person or organization, that individual will be recused, and a replacement will be identified by the Rapid Respond Fund Coordinator. Each Review Team will have a minimum of four people, consisting of:

- The Rapid Response Fund Coordinator
- At least one ANSTF member
  - ANSTF member representatives will be requested to serve on Review Teams on a rotational basis.
- At least one regional panel member to provide regional expertise on site locations
  - Each of the six regional panels will solicit volunteers annually from their membership to serve on a Review Team when needed. The Rapid Respond Fund Coordinator will match people with incoming proposals based on site location of the project and request their participation on quarterly Review Teams, as appropriate.
- At least one subject matter expert (to provide expertise on the targeted species or response measures used)
  - The ANSTF Experts Database will be used to identify and solicit subject matter experts to serve on the Review Team to provide expert opinion on the validity of the proposals. The Rapid Respond Fund Coordinator will match people from the database with incoming proposals based on the targeted species and response measures proposed and request their participation on quarterly Review Teams, as appropriate.

Once established, each Quarterly Review Team will evaluate each proposal using the criteria outlined below. In addition, the Review Team may, but is not required to:

- Conduct reference checks relevant to the proposal with any references cited in a proposal to verify information regarding an applicant and rely on and consider any relevant information from these references in the evaluation of a proposal.
- Conduct any background research needed during the evaluation process and consider any relevant information resulting in the evaluation of proposals.
- Seek clarification from an applicant with respect to their proposal. Such clarification will not offer the applicant the opportunity to change or provide new information.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, acting as administrator of the awards and upon direction of the Review Team, may negotiate selected project scopes of work and budgets prior to award. If the applicant agrees to a new scope of work or budget, the applicant will be required to submit revised SF-424 forms and narratives prior to award.

Following evaluation of the proposals against the merit criteria, the Review Team will make a funding recommendation to either fund, not fund, or defer funding until a later review cycle to assess the availability of remaining funds. The funding recommendations will be submitted to the ANSTF co-chairs for final consideration. The ANSTF co-chairs will work alongside the Review Team to make the final funding decisions. The Review Team and ANSTF co-chairs will strive to have all funding decisions finalized within six weeks after each proposed quarterly deadline. All decisions will be promptly communicated to the ANSTF membership. Proposals will be accepted until the Rapid Response Fund is depleted.

#### ***5.C. MERIT CRITERIA***

Proposals received by the deadline will be evaluated and scored using the merit criteria and assigned weights described below. This evaluation is used to determine which new species detections demonstrate the need to warrant a Rapid Response. The evaluation requires a determination of whether the invasion will have significant impacts to the environment, economy, cultural resources, and/or human, animal, or plant health. The evaluation will also consider the management goal and its probability of successful achievement.

#### **Potential Impact of the Invasion: 25%**

- Known or potential environmental, economic, cultural, and/or human, animal, or plant health impacts of the targeted species
- Probability of spread from the colonized area
- Proximity to vulnerable, high priority, or protected areas (e.g., headwaters, critical habitat)
- Occurrence on a species watch list or similar prioritization tool (not required, but given higher consideration)

#### **Proposed Approach: 25%**

- Validity of the response or assessment measures to be used
- Understanding and ability to complete environmental compliance and permitting requirements
- Confidence in accomplishing the stated management goal

#### **Preparedness: 15%**

- Ability to secure staff, equipment, permits, and other compliance documents

**Experience and Qualifications: 15%**

- Prior involvement in Rapid Response efforts
- Capacity and ability to conduct proposed actions in a rapid manner

**Budget: 10%**

- Cost effectiveness and detail of project cost
- Inclusion of financial match or in-kind contributions (not required, but given higher consideration)
- Connection of this project to broader management or funding efforts

**Post Response Commitment: 10%**

- Commitment and outside financial support to conduct post-rapid response activities to monitor for adverse impacts and prevent re-invasion of the targeted species and implement restoration and mitigation measures for any off-target adverse impacts from the treatments

**6. POST AWARD ACTIONS**

**6.A. REPORTING**

During the term of the award, awardees will be required to submit interim financial and performance reports every six months after the notice of award is issued that depict actions, progress made in achieving the stated objectives and management goal, and any significant developments. Final reports are also required no later than 120 calendar days after the award period or performance end date. At a minimum, the final report should include:

- Overview of project
- Description, location, and timeline of actions taken
- Any natural, cultural, or economic resources (e.g., Threatened or Endangered species, sensitive habitats, commercial operations) that may have influenced the choice of response measure.
- Roles of all entities involved in response
- Barriers or challenges experienced, and contingency actions taken
- Summary of key issues and lessons learned
- Outcome of Rapid Response
- Description of any post-response actions conducted or planned
- Completed template from the USFWS used to record project details and outcomes of the response efforts supported by the Rapid Response Fund (see Section 6.c).

All reports will be submitted through GrantSolutions. The Rapid Response Fund Coordinator will review all reports and approve them upon confirmation that all required components are complete. The Rapid Response Fund Coordinator will also compile and organize final reports into an accessible database / clearinghouse (e.g., The National EDRR Information System) so that the tools, outcomes, lessons learned, and post-response actions may inform future Rapid Response efforts.

Following project completion, successful applicants must also agree to complete an annual survey to track the success of projects funded by the Rapid Response Fund over time. The survey will inquire about any post-rapid response activities taken and the sustainability of the management goals achieved by the project.

## **6.B. UNUSED FUNDS**

Any moneys remaining in the fund at the end of a fiscal year will be carried over to the following fiscal year. Unspent funds that cannot be carried over to the next year shall be spent on resources to support Rapid Response activities, as decided upon by the ANSTF. Possible expenditures are equipment and supplies to build a cache for future Rapid Response efforts. Funding may also be used to support Rapid Response research needs identified in the ANSTF National AIS Research Priorities List.

## **6.C. METRICS**

There is value in assessing and monitoring performance of the response efforts supported by the Rapid Response Fund to demonstrate a return on investment as well as advancement of the science that supports rapid response. It is recommended that specific, measurable, achievable, results-oriented, and timefixed (SMART) performance metrics be developed to evaluate projects supported by the fund as well as the fund itself. Below are example metrics to be recorded on projects awarded through the fund as well as on the overall Rapid Response Fund operation. This list will be amended once the pilot fund is implemented and there is a better understanding regarding what information can be feasibly obtained or is useful to assessing the performance of the Rapid Response Fund.

### **Metrics specific to projects, to be included in final report**

- 1) Was the management goal achieved? If yes, what contributed to success? If no, why not?
- 2) Describe the change in population number of the targeted species and size of infestation that resulted from this project (e.g., estimated abundance or density of organism before and after response actions).
- 3) Project area size, including size of infestation and size of treatment area
- 4) Was the response completed on time? If no, why not?
- 5) Was the response completed within the allocated budget? If no, why not?
- 6) Did funding from the Rapid Response Fund result in a response effort that would not have occurred otherwise? If no, why not?
- 7) Did funding from the Rapid Response Fund leverage additional funds or support within the project area? If yes, describe.
- 8) Has this project protected adjacent areas from contamination from the targeted species? If yes, describe.
- 9) What risks to human health, ecosystem stability, and infrastructure and potential economic impact were avoided by completing this project?
- 10) Did this project take place in or serve a disadvantaged community (as identified by the Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool - <https://toolkit.climate.gov/tool/climate-and-economic-justice-screening-tool>)?

### **Metrics specific to projects, to be monitored by the Rapid Response Coordinator**

1. Did the Review Team meet their deadlines to evaluate proposals and make the award selections?
2. Were all reports submitted by the deadline?
3. Number of years beyond the project's completion date that the area has remained uninvaded from the targeted species.

## Metrics specific to the Rapid Response Fund, to be monitored by the Rapid Response Coordinator

1. Number of responses funded.
2. Number of proposals received.
3. Track groups that apply (e.g., number of states, tribes, territories).
4. Track locations where projects occurred.
5. Percentage of submitted proposals funded.
6. Funds awarded vs Funds requested.
7. Amount of matching funds leveraged by Rapid Response Fund.
8. Number of new detections eradicated before they cause significant harm.

## 7. DEFINITIONS<sup>1</sup>

**Aquatic invasive species.** An invasive species that resides (for at least part of its life cycle) within fresh, wetland, estuarine, or marine waters.

**Containment:** A management intervention aimed to restrict an invasive species to a limited geographical range.

**Control:** A management intervention aimed at reducing the density and/or distribution of an invasive species to an acceptable level.

**Early Detection.** A process of surveying for, reporting, and verifying the presence of a non-native species before the founding population begins to reproduce or spreads so widely that eradication is no longer feasible.

**Eradication.** Removal or destruction of an entire population of an invasive species within a specified area.

**Interstate organization.** Entities established by an interstate compact that is approved by Federal statute; represents two or more states or tribes; and has jurisdiction over, serves as forum for coordinating, or otherwise has a role or responsibility for the management of, any land or other natural resources.

**Interstate organizations.** An entity established by an interstate compact that is approved by Congress, a Federal statute, or a treaty or other international agreement that represents 2 or more states, political subdivisions, or tribes or 1 or more States or political subdivisions or tribe, and has jurisdiction over, serves as forum for coordinating, or otherwise has a role or responsibility for the management of, any land or other natural resource.

**Introduction.** The intentional or unintentional escape, release, dissemination, or placement of an organism into an ecosystem to which it is not native.

**Invasive Species.** With regard to a particular ecosystem, a non-native organism whose introduction causes or is likely to cause economic or environmental harm or harm to human, animal, or plant health.

**Invasive Species Management.** Activities including but not limited to planning (identification and inventory, prioritization, establishing action thresholds), monitoring, prevention, early detection,

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<sup>1</sup> Most definitions were taken from the Invasive Species Policy within the Department of the Interior Departmental Manual (<https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/elips/documents/524-dm-1-508.pdf>). Definitions not found in the Policy were drafted by the ANSTF Rapid Response Fund working group.



rapid response, eradication, control, restoration, research, and regulatory approaches used to minimize the threat of invasive species.

**Native Species.** With respect to a particular ecosystem, an organism, including its seeds, eggs, spores, or other biological material capable of propagating that species, that, other than as a result of an introduction, historically occurred or currently occurs in that ecosystem.

**Prevention.** The action of stopping invasive species from being introduced or spreading into a new ecosystem.

**Range Expansion:** Increases in the geographic area occupied by a species.

**Rapid Response.** A process that is employed to eradicate the founding population of a non-native species from a specific location before it begins to reproduce or spreads so widely that eradication is no longer feasible.

**Response measures.** Approaches or tools that are used to remove or destroy the target species. Response measures may include biological, chemical, manual, or mechanical techniques.

**Secondary Spread:** Dispersal or transport of invasive species from populations residing outside of their native range.

**Species.** A set of animals or plants in which the members have similar characteristics to each other and can reproduce with one another in nature and produce fertile offspring.