

Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force

Strategic Plan (2002 – 2007)

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The Nonindigenous Aquatic Nuisance Prevention and Control Act of 1990 (NANPCA, P.L.101-636) established a Task Force to coordinate activities among Federal agencies and between Federal agencies, regional, State, tribal and local organizations involved in carrying out the Act.

The **mission** of the Aquatic Nuisance Species (ANS) Task Force is to develop and implement a program for waters of the United States, to:

- Prevent introduction and dispersal of aquatic nuisance species;
- Monitor, control and study such species; and
- Educate and inform the general public and program stakeholders about the prevention and control of these species.

NANPCA, updated and reauthorized in the National Invasive Species Act of 1996 (NISA)¹, mandated Task Force membership to include representatives from six Federal Agencies and four *Ex Officio* members. The Task Force Chairpersons, designated to be the Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service and the Undersecretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere, have broadened this membership to now include seven Federal agencies and 11 *Ex Officio* members.² The Task Force operates under the guidelines of the Federal Advisory Committee Act to carry out its responsibilities and implement provisions of NANPCA.

The Task Force acts as a coordinating body that establishes program parameters, with programmatic actions carried out under the authorities of the Federal and state agencies and other authorized entities. NANPCA provided the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Coast Guard and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration with the legal authority to issue regulations necessary to implement the Federal ANS program. In addition, other Federal agencies on the Task Force use other legal authorities (such as the Lacey Act and the Plant Protection Act) to support program implementation. In the 1996 reauthorization, Congress authorized annual agency appropriations of over \$30 million for ANS activities for the period 1997 - 2002. In fiscal year 2001, the Task Force agencies covered under this authorization spent about \$15 million for ANS activities. In addition to the spending authorized under NANPCA, other Federal agencies in the Task Force spent over \$20 million of Congressional appropriations to carry out programs indirectly related to ANS program activities.

The purpose of this strategic plan is to further understanding of what the ANS Task Force does and the direction it plans to take in coordinating Federal agency ANS activities. In the 12 years since Congress passed NANPCA, much has been achieved. The Task Force will use this strategic plan as a roadmap for accomplishing national ANS goals over the next five years including working with the National Invasive Species Council to implement the National Invasive Species Management Plan entitled "Meeting the Invasive Species Challenge".

Task Force Goals and Objectives

Since 1994, the ANS Task Force has used its **ANS Program Document**³ to provide direction for ANS activities. The ANS Program focuses on three main goals – prevention, detection and monitoring, and control of ANS. To support these core program elements, the ANS Program specified three support goals – research, education, and technical assistance. In its current strategic planning discussions, the Task Force reaffirmed the goals of the 1994 ANS Program and decided to continue using much of the information gathered previously to carry out the mandates in NANPCA/NISA, ***with the following two key changes of emphasis.***

- The Task Force proposes a greater focus on prevention strategies, including more emphasis on global outreach. A major change in this plan is the recognition of the importance of addressing intentional introductions of nonindigenous aquatic species and the need to assess the risk of these species becoming nuisances in U.S. waters.
- The Task Force also proposes a number of changes in the way it organizes its work processes and coordinates the activities of the Federal agencies in the Task Force. The plan focuses on measuring the progress in achieving each of the strategic goals and objectives and working more closely with program stakeholders to find ways to better achieve the Task Force mission.

Goal 1: Reduce the threat of harmful aquatic species being introduced into U.S. waters.

Preventing introductions of potentially harmful species is the most efficient way to reduce the threat of harmful aquatic nuisance species. In the case of unintentional introductions, the Act clearly points out the importance of ballast water as a pathway, and much of the activity of the Task Force has focused on ballast water. Other pathways have not been systematically examined in terms of magnitude of risk or methods of interdicting the pathways.

While the Act does not give the Task Force any specific additional authorities relative to intentional introductions of potentially harmful species, it is clear that a comprehensive program needs to encompass both intentional and unintentional introductions. There are some tools available to address intentional introductions on a piecemeal basis. This goal seeks to enhance Task Force activities, using existing authorities, to address intentional introductions with a more comprehensive approach.

Objective 1.1 Facilitate the development and use of science based risk assessments to determine the level of risk associated with intentional introductions of potentially invasive aquatic species.

Risk assessments are useful in making scientifically sound decisions about the risks associated with introductions of nonindigenous species. The Task Force developed a "Generic Nonindigenous Aquatic Organisms Risk Analysis Review Process" in 1996 to provide a standardized process for evaluating the risk of introducing nonindigenous organisms to a new environment. The Task Force members will use their expertise and coordination ability to assist and facilitate the use of risk assessment tools by:

- *Maintaining a database to track Federal agencies' notifications that they are considering requests for introduction of new species. In its annual report, the Task Force will provide the following information:*

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<i>Federal Agency</i>	<i>Risk Assessments undertaken (species) or under consideration by Agency</i>	<i>Action Taken by Agency</i>	<i>Completion Date</i>

- *Providing technical assistance on the methodologies and processes proposed for risk assessments.*
- *Establishing and maintaining a list of existing aquatic risk assessments which meets one of the following:*
 - *Used the ANSTF risk process;*
 - *Has relevance because of the aquatic organism covered; and/or*
 - *Has relevance because of the unique risk process or methodology used.*
- *Coordinating and reviewing input from Regional Panels concerning priority aquatic invasive species.*

Objective 1.2 Identify high risk pathways for the introduction of harmful aquatic species into U.S. waters and coordinate specific actions to reduce the likelihood of introduction of harmful nonindigenous aquatic species.

Determining in advance whether a nonindigenous aquatic species will become a nuisance is difficult and often impossible. Most high-risk pathways are likely to be complex and involve many stakeholders. The Task Force will coordinate implementation of a pathway evaluation process (as specified in the 1994 ANS Program, pages 16 – 17), that results in:

- *An annually updated list of high risk pathways, identified using established criteria.*
- *Identification of coordinated actions which must be taken to interdict high risk pathways.*
- *Coordinated Federal Agencies’ international activities (attendance at scientific meetings, etc.) to most efficiently achieve this objective.*

These coordinating actions will be assessed and reported annually:

<i>High Risk pathway and interdiction recommendations</i>	<i>Task Force coordination activity</i>	<i>Agency actions/impact</i>

Objective 1.3 Increase public awareness about the importance of ANS introductions and actions that can be taken to reduce the possibility of ANS becoming established in U.S. waters.

Public awareness activities are necessary to ensure that people understand the problems and impacts associated with ANS. It is also critical that the Task Force provide information to help the public understand what they can do to help reduce the ANS threat. The Task Force will report annually on:

- *How well the public understands the impacts of ANS and the need for action to control ANS species and their impacts.*
- *Workshops, pamphlets, and other activities and products for educating targeted audiences on specific actions they can take to reduce the threat of ANS introductions.*
- *Its inventory of public awareness products.*
- *Its use of the World Wide Web in accomplishing its mission.*

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Objective 1.4 Prioritize and promote research to reduce the threat of ANS introduction into U.S. waters.

To help ensure that research addresses critical needs, the Task Force will coordinate nationwide with Federal, State, and Tribal Government officials, academia, and other affected entities to:

- *Develop an annual list of aquatic invasive species research priorities.*
- *Coordinate research activities and maintain a catalog of these activities to ensure efficient use of research resources.*
- *Maintain and disseminate a Research Protocol.*

Goal 2: Minimize the harmful effects of aquatic nuisance species already introduced into the waters of the United States.

New nonindigenous aquatic species are certain to be introduced into U.S. waters, despite the best preventive efforts. Once a species has been introduced into U.S. waters and is established as causing or having the potential to cause harm, the Task Force seeks to minimize harm to public interest priorities by preventing and controlling further spread, using environmentally sound methods. Specific Task Force activities are outlined in the 1994 ANS Program Document (pages 18 –29). In addition to developing species-specific control plans, other important activities include the development of rapid response capabilities, survey and monitoring efforts, state management plans, and research and education specifically related to monitoring and control.

Objective 2.1 Develop capacity to respond rapidly to invasions.

The best way to eradicate or control a new invasion is to take action as soon as possible. The development of a rapid response planning process is an obvious first step. The Task Force will facilitate this planning process by:

- *Identifying lessons learned from previous attempts to respond rapidly to new ANS invasions.*
- *Analyzing rapid response plans done for other events (oil spills, hurricanes, foreign animal diseases, etc.).*
- *Identifying what the Task Force can do to facilitate the development of contingency plans.*
- *Ensuring that key elements of regional contingency plans (infrastructure, resources, jurisdictional issues) are addressed.*
- *Setting up a rapid response monitoring system that measures and reports on the area of U.S. waters covered by contingency plans.*

Objective 2.2 Facilitate survey and monitoring efforts to detect and control ANS

To effectively control invasions of ANS, it is necessary to conduct coordinated detection and monitoring efforts and ensure that data and information are readily available. The Task Force plans to continue its efforts as described in the 1994 ANS Program Document (pages 18 – 22), and to emphasize the following:

- *Making the information system more accessible.*
- *Ensuring the coordination of monitoring and surveys in aquatic systems including the targeting of high risk areas.*
- *Developing and ensuring the use of common protocols for surveys and database standards.*
- *Reporting annually on efforts of Federal agencies and other strategic partners on monitoring and assessment:*

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<i>Fed agency/other</i>	<i>Survey activities</i>	<i>Monitoring activities</i>	<i>Geographic area</i>

Objective 2.3 Facilitate development of State and Interstate management plans to limit spread of ANS.

The Task Force will continue to encourage States to develop state management plans for ANS. The Task Force provides guidance to States on how to prepare these management plans and offers technical and financial resources to complete the plans. The Task Force will measure its progress in achieving this ANS control objective by tracking and reporting on:

- *The number of state management plans in place.*
- *The status of plans under development within each Regional Panel’s jurisdiction:*

<i>Regional Panel</i>	<i>State</i>	<i>Plan Status</i>	<i>State Agency Contacted (Ag, EPA, DNR)</i>	<i>Contact Date</i>

Objective 2.4 Coordinate development and implementation of ANS control plans.

In the 1994 ANS Program document, the Task Force established an ANS control protocol (pages 22 – 29). For any proposed control action, the Task Force will coordinate discussions about criteria to trigger an action and will ensure that the criteria and processes in the 1994 ANS Program are incorporated. The Task Force will monitor, evaluate, and report annually on the status of cooperative control plans and programs:

<i>Agency/Partners</i>	<i>Control Program/Species Proposed/Accepted</i>	<i>Control Plan Developed</i>	<i>Implementation action completed</i>	<i>Implementation problems encountered (evaluation)</i>

Objective 2.5 Encourage education and outreach activities concerning ANS.

Public awareness is necessary to ensure that people understand and appreciate the problems and impacts associated with ANS. A robust public awareness program will help the public understand what they can do to help monitor and control ANS in U.S. waters. The Task Force will report annually on:

- *Workshops, pamphlets, and other activities and products for educating targeted audiences on specific actions to take to detect, monitor, and control ANS.*
- *Report on efforts to help the public understand the impacts of ANS and the reasons for ANS regulations to be put into place.*
- *Its inventory of public awareness products.*
- *Its use of the World Wide Web in accomplishing its mission.*

Objective 2.6 Prioritize and promote research to evaluate the harmful effects of ANS.

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Although much research has been conducted for some invasive aquatic species, there are many species for which very little is known. Information, such as the biology of an ANS species and its interaction within its new ecosystem, is essential to effective control and management. To ensure that research addresses critical needs, the Task Force works with Federal, State, and Tribal Government officials, academia, and other affected entities to:

- *Develop an annual list of aquatic invasive species research priorities.*
- *Coordinate research activities and maintain a catalog of these activities to ensure efficient use of research resources.*
- *Maintain and disseminate a Research Protocol.*

Goal 3: Cooperate in global efforts to reduce ANS harm

Rapid increases in travel and trade have dramatically contributed to aquatic nuisance species invasions, both within the U.S. and around the world. The Task Force will broaden its involvement in international ANS activities and organizations, to gain a common understanding on invasion pathways and to anticipate new ANS problems. It will also pay attention to raising the level of understanding and expertise on aquatic nuisance species worldwide, by encouraging technical assistance to other countries, sponsorship of workshops, and the sharing of scientific information.

Objective 3.1 Share information and expertise on ANS

Public education and outreach activities, both in the U.S. and abroad will be a very high priority. The Task Force will report annually on:

- *Federal Agency participation in meetings/workshops (on risk assessment, for example).*
- *ANS Task Force website links to international ANS activities and databases.*
- *How widely the ANS Program risk assessment process is distributed.*

Objective 3.2 Coordinate ANS Task Force agency international activities

It is imperative that U.S. Government agencies coordinate their international ANS activities, to have similar ANS policy, education, and outreach messages, and to conduct compatible ANS control and monitoring efforts. The Task Force will report annually on:

- *International ANS priorities (including North America analysis).*
- *International ANS databases available for use in risk assessments, policy making, and developing import and export regulations.*

Goal 4: Maximize organizational effectiveness of the ANS Task Force

No single entity has the human, technical and financial resources to fully address ANS problems. To be successful, cooperation and coordination are necessary at a variety of levels – among federal agencies; between federal agencies and state, tribal and local governments; and between public and non-public sectors. A primary purpose of the Task Force is to facilitate such cooperation and coordination. Effective Task Force processes and systems, and adequate staff

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support are essential to fulfilling this purpose. Also, the Task Force should make an effort to address institutional barriers that discourage such activities.

Current Task Force coordination involves the following main processes:

- The Task Force meets formally in a public meeting three times a year to discuss ANS issues with program stakeholders.⁴ At these meetings Task Force members share information, set priorities, and make decisions about what the Task Force and its individual agencies and organizations are doing to address the goals of the ANS Program.
- An Executive Secretary provides support for the Task Force and facilitates the implementation of Task Force decisions.
- Several Task Force committees are responsible for ongoing studies and for recommending actions on specific ANS processes and issues.⁵
- Regional panels coordinate area-wide ANS activities in four parts of the country – the Great Lakes, the Gulf of Mexico, Northeast and the Western states.⁶
- A State grants program supports implementation of activities by State Agencies that use Task Force-approved State and interstate ANS management plans.⁷

Although this framework has been effective, the Task Force recognizes that it must make substantial changes to the way it operates – to become more proactive and to maximize its effectiveness in the future. The Task Force will focus on four strategic objectives to achieve this goal.

Objective 4.1. Strengthen the coordination capacity of the Task Force

The Task Force currently is one of several loosely-connected governmental and non-governmental entities that have varying degrees of overlapping influence in preventing and controlling ANS. The Task Force formed relationships with these entities to assist with implementation of the 1994 ANS Program. While this arrangement enhanced a shared sense of ownership of the ANS issue by all entities, it also added to the confusion about coordination processes, Task Force accountability, and effectiveness in achieving the Task Force's mission. To ensure that all the ANS stakeholders address issues in a coordinated way, with minimal redundancy of activities and efficient use of resources, the Task Force will focus on several key coordination elements:

- *Evaluation of the ANS Task Force committee structure to ensure consistency and efficiency in carrying out Task Force activities.*
- *Nation-wide coverage by Regional Panels and increased communication between Regional Panels and the Task Force to address prioritization of issues and activities.*
- *Technical guidance and resource assistance to States through a coordinated effort by Regional Panels and the Task Force, to encourage development of State/Interstate ANS management plans.*
- *Adequate support by ANS Task Force agencies to ensure effective Task Force action on all aspects of this strategic plan.*

The Task Force will also work closely with the National Invasive Species Council to facilitate implementation of ANS activities related to the National Management Plan.

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Objective 4.2. Ensure that adequate legal authorities are in place to implement the ANS Program.

The Task Force identified several issues relative to legal authorities that must be addressed to properly implement the ANS Program:

- *Emergency response actions.*
- *National Environmental Policy Act application to ANS concerns.*
- *Joint Project Authority to pool agency funds when necessary.*
- *Prevention activities such as screening specific pathways or species.*

The Task Force is also exploring the following:

- *Relationship of Federal and State legal authorities.*
- *"Education" activities vs. "Marketing and Promotion" activities.*
- *International legal authorities (U.S./Canada/Mexico).*
- *Control program actions (NANPCA authorizes a very cumbersome process for initiating control programs).*

Objective 4.3 Coordinate Federal agency budgets to support Task Force priorities and establish a clear process that links local needs with the Federal budget process.

One Task Force meeting each year (late fall – winter) will be used to discuss priority needs presented by the Regional Panels and to develop focus areas for Federal Agency budget development and execution. The Task Force will develop a matrix of individual Federal Agency ANS programs and budgets to communicate Agency activities and needs to the Office of Management and Budget. (A suggested format for this matrix is included on pages 9 – 10, "Linking Goals and Objectives to Annual Plans".)

Objective 4.4 Institute an organizational improvement process based on an annual evaluation of ANS Program progress.

The Task Force will produce an annual report that assesses progress in achieving ANS program goals and prioritizes future actions. The report will focus on annual priorities and goals decided at the budget prioritization meeting described in Objective 4.3. It is expected that much of the input for this report will originate from the Regional Panels. The Task Force's Executive Secretary will be responsible for ensuring completion of the report and follow-up actions recommended in the report. The first report is to be completed before the end of 2002.

Table 1. Federal Agency annual goals, activities, and needs

ANS TF Goals	Objectives	ANS TF	FWS	NOAA	USCG	US Army	APHIS	EPA	StateDept.
Goal 1: Reduce the threat of harmful aquatic species being introduced into U.S. waters.	1.1 <i>Facilitate the development and use of science based risk assessments to determine the level of risk associated with intentional introductions of potentially invasive aquatic species.</i>								
	1.2 Identify high risk pathways for the introduction of harmful aquatic species into U.S. waters and coordinate specific actions to reduce the likelihood of introduction of harmful nonindigenous aquatic species.								
	1.3 Increase public awareness about the importance of ANS introductions and actions that can be taken to reduce the possibility of ANS becoming established in U.S. waters.								
	1.4 Prioritize and promote research to reduce the threat of ANS introduction into U.S. waters.								
Goal 2. Minimize the harmful effects of aquatic nuisance species already introduced into the waters of the U.S.	2.1 Develop capacity to respond rapidly to invasions.								
	2.2 Facilitate survey and monitoring efforts to detect and control ANS								
	2.3 Facilitate development of state management plans to limit spread of ANS								
	2.4 Coordinate development and implementation of ANS control plans.								
	2.5 Encourage education and outreach activities concerning ANS.								
	2.6 Prioritize and promote research to evaluate the harmful effects of ANS								

Linking Goals and Objectives to Annual Plans

ANS TF Goals	Objectives	ANS TF	FWS	NOAA	USCG	US Army	APHIS	EPA	StateDept.
Goal 3. Cooperate in global efforts to reduce ANS harm	3.1 Share information and expertise on ANS								
	3.2 Coordinate ANS Task Force agency international activities								
Goal 4. Maximize organizational effectiveness	4.1 Strengthen the coordination capacity of the Task Force								
	4.2 Ensure that adequate legal authorities are in place to implement the ANS Program								
	4.1 Coordinate Federal agency budgets to support Task Force priorities and establish a clear process that links local needs with the Federal budget process.								
	4.4 Institute an organizational improvement process based on an annual evaluation of ANS program progress.								

¹ National Invasive Species Act of 1996 (P.L. 104-332, 110 Stat. 4073, 10/26/96)

² For a list of current Task Force members and other information about the group, visit <http://anstaskforce.gov/TF%20Definition.htm>

³ To view the ANS Program Document online, visit <http://www.anstaskforce.gov/ansprogrptoc.htm>

⁴ For more information about ANS Task Force meetings, visit <http://anstaskforce.gov/meetings.htm>

⁵ For a detailed description of the Task Force Committees and their activities, visit

<http://anstaskforce.gov/committees.htm>

⁶ For links to the activities of the Regional Panels, visit <http://anstaskforce.gov/regpanels.htm>

⁷ For information about State Management Plans, visit <http://anstaskforce.gov/mgtplans.htm>