Proposal to the Great Lakes Panel on Aquatic Nuisance Species
May 16, 2023 – Draft 4

Great Lakes Panel on Aquatic Nuisance Species
Position Statement on Appropriate Messaging

Introduction

Preventing the spread of harmful aquatic nuisance species (herein referred to as aquatic invasive species or AIS) is a primary goal of the Great Lakes Panel. It is widely known that the management of these species relies on effective communication and outreach to stakeholders. However, current messaging about invasive species may be undermining management goals.

Many traditional and common names, especially those with biogeographic reference, were often used as a means of associating the region of discovery or for associating the appearance or behaviors of the organism being named. As such, these traditional names were not ordinarily given with consideration as to whether or not such a name or term could be considered as derogatory or culturally sensitive and can cause negative societal impacts by stigmatizing people from those locations or perpetuating derogatory, xenophobic, or racist language. Use of militaristic, nativist, or colonial language in AIS management can alienate marginalized stakeholders while framing environmental management in overly-simplistic "good (native) versus evil (introduced)" terms that downplay the importance of human behavior in the introduction and spread of invasive species. Communication research has recently shown that strong militaristic and nativist language in science communication is not more effective than other strategies at engaging water users in AIS management actions.

To create more inclusive campaigns, communications and outreach materials, the Great Lakes Panel has recognized the need to join other organizations in the effort of evaluating historically named species as well as the need to consider terminology that will consider cultural sensitivities and unintended consequences to terms and messaging used to communicate about AIS.

Support

Thoughtful use of vocabulary and descriptive language is required in all aspects of AIS management, whether communicating the value of management programs to elected officials or educating the public to promote AIS prevention actions. The Great Lakes Panel, led by the Information and Education Committee, recognizes the legacies of historical species names, militaristic terminology and other language, and their unintended impacts among affected communites, which can and have caused stigma that impedes support for more effective AIS management among affected communities. Based on these ethical considerations, the Great Lakes Panel supports new communication approaches and naming conventions aimed at providing the most appropriate, effective, inclusive and universally accepted terminology used to describe AIS.

Priorities

To promote a better path forward for both of these issues, the Great Lakes Panel supports:

1) Research to understand language use within invasive species communication and the impacts of that language.
2) Development and use of guidelines (that consider on ethical principles) for the creation or modification of existing inappropriate common names such as those by the Entomological Society of America Better Common Names Project and the University of Minnesota Extension Invasive Species Community of Practice.
3) Outreach and engagement efforts that apply known information in these fields or support people already working on these issues as part of AIS management.

Resolution

We believe that by supporting work that will incorporate these stated priorities, that the GLC can be more effective in considering the diverse communities we serve, invite more people into conversation and engagement about AIS issues, and ultimately make our AIS management efforts more effective. We hereby call upon the AIS community to support our responsibility to ensure that outreach campaigns, programs, language, names and messages are welcoming, ethical, and culturally sensitive.

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Authority

Chartered under U.S. federal law, the Great Lakes Panel on Aquatic Nuisance Species is responsible for advancing aquatic nuisance species (ANS) prevention and control efforts in the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence system. The Panel, a binational body composed of representatives from government (state, provincial, federal, tribal), business and industry, universities, citizen environmental groups and the larger user community, primarily operates through coordination, while providing guidance on research initiatives, policy development and information/education programs on a regional basis.

Supporting Literature:

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