



## **Position Statement on Aquatic Invasive Species March 2018**

Aquatic invasive species (AIS) are plants and animals that are non-native to a given area or region and whose introduction causes or is likely to cause economic or environmental damages to that region. As they continue to spread throughout the United States, AIS threaten America's aquatic habitats with long-lasting environmental damage that directly affects boaters, anglers, local communities and the recreational fishing industry. AIS are costly to manage and control, can restrict fishing access, degrade waters, reduce tourism, and cause damage to vessels costing thousands of dollars to repair. Management and control costs are usually borne by the taxpayers; however, anglers and boaters usually bear the brunt of AIS-related costs in terms of lost opportunities and degraded ecosystems.

The American Sportfishing Association (ASA) strongly believes that the recreational fishing community shares a responsibility not to contribute to the spread of AIS. Although eradication has been successful in some instances and new technologies show promise, it is unlikely that the United States will ever eradicate all the AIS already within its waters. However, it is crucial that local, state and federal governments, citizens and private industry work together to curb the spread of these harmful species and prevent the infestation of new waters.

Although thousands of AIS have invaded North America, those most visible to the fishing and boating industry are sea lamprey in the Great Lakes and Lake Champlain; zebra and quagga mussels; aquatic weeds, including Eurasian watermilfoil, hydrilla and starry stonewort; New Zealand mudsnails; and several species of Asian carp. These species have few predators, disrupt the natural food web, out-compete native plants and animals for resources, and can degrade water quality.

AIS can be spread from one water body to another by attaching to boats and trailers, can be carried in improperly drained bilge or ballast water, but can also be transferred by birds, mammals, and reptiles. AIS have already forced governments to limit boating access, close public boat ramps, and reduce fishing opportunities across the United States. A number of federal and state agencies have enacted laws and regulations for mandatory inspections, permits, launch availability, and access restrictions for vessels prior to entering or exiting public waterways.

Broad initiatives are being taken on the national level to combat AIS. Most laws and regulations used in the fight against AIS are more proscriptive than proactive. State, county and municipal agencies are at a disadvantage because species know no boundaries and instead follow the landscape and watersheds, making prevention and education an inter-state, inter-jurisdictional problem. Consequently, ineffective or underfunded efforts by one of these jurisdictions can affect the success of programs in neighboring jurisdictions. Multiple agencies having authorities over programs that combat the spread of AIS, can hinder communication, cooperation and innovation.

Vessel decontamination programs and boat inspection stations are commonly used throughout the western United States. State agencies usually run these programs, often supported by national educational initiatives. The federal- and state-funded programs share

similar components, focusing on the “Clean, Drain, and Dry” and “Stop Aquatic Hitchhikers” programs. These programs are widely publicized in some regions and at boating access points. However, research has found such programs are not as effective in changing the behavior of boaters as agencies had hoped. State laws in the West vary on when and where boaters must have their vessels inspected. Some inspection stations are dedicated to one large lake or reservoir, while others are centralized. The most common programs place inspection stations at state borders. If boats are suspected to be infested, they often are impounded and must be decontaminated before being allowed to enter the state. Some states have regulations that are more restrictive than others.

Many states have turned to boaters as a source of AIS funding. However, in recent years, budget cuts and staff reductions have stressed AIS prevention and education programs and created additional burdens, inconveniences and costs on anglers and boaters. This discourages participation. For example, limited funding can make it difficult to implement multi-location boat inspection stations along a state’s waterways. These stations, and the staff to operate them, are essential to keeping waterways open to boaters.

Robust, coordinated and consistent action on all levels needs to be part of collective efforts to tackle AIS. While it may be impossible to eradicate all AIS from infested locations, ongoing efforts have proven that it is possible to control and slow the spread of these species.

AIS control should not be used solely as a reason to close water bodies to the angling and boating public. ASA, in concert with its partners in the boating industry, supports:

- Government funding and innovations needed to support the infrastructure, educational programs and research initiatives that must be available to strengthen the nation’s fight against AIS;
- A national review and assessment of the effectiveness of current AIS methods, and an identification of areas for improvement. Such improvements include: decontamination procedures, the availability of decontamination stations in relation to usage and inspection procedures, and the need for a national decontamination standard;
- Regional and national legislation that enhances AIS protections and appropriations;
- Interstate uniformity in state management plans, and development of management strategies for bodies of water that become infested;
- Management plans that balance prevention, decontamination and access;
- Establishment of a coalition from the recreational fishing and boating industry and from non-governmental organizations to advocate for reasonable AIS control measures and development of management strategies to be implemented if a resource becomes infested; and
- Allowing fishing and boating access while minimizing inconvenience and cost.