

Great Lakes Panel on Aquatic Nuisance Species
Position Statement on Professional Responsibility for Reporting of Aquatic Invasive Species

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Monitoring is essential to detect, contain and respond to new aquatic invasive species (AIS), yet funding for monitoring is woefully inadequate. Consequently, management agencies must rely on timely reporting of new AIS discoveries from citizen monitoring groups, field biologists and researchers. Understandably, there is a lag time between the date when samples are taken and completion of the laboratory analysis that identifies a new finding, but thereafter, rapid reporting of that finding is critical to implement control actions and prevent spread to other waters.

The Great Lakes Panel on Aquatic Nuisance Species is concerned about reports that some scientists have been unwilling to report new AIS discoveries prior to publication of their finding in a peer-reviewed publication. The Panel recognizes that the publish-or-perish imperative may underlie such decisions by career scientists. However, the consequence is that AIS discoveries can go unreported for months or possibly years, and in the interim, the organism can become established (if not already established), and expand its range beyond the original discovery location. Prevention and control efforts that could have been initiated early then become much more complicated or are thwarted altogether. It is the Panel's position that scientists have an ethical responsibility to report such information as soon as it is verified, and the act of not doing so is unethical; in fact, in some states such reporting is required by law.

The Panel strongly urges researchers and other relevant groups to report new discoveries of AIS, either new species or known species in new locations, in a timely manner to the appropriate state or federal natural resource agency. In fact, rapid response is best served if the appropriate state or federal agency is alerted as soon as possible – even prior to confirmation of species identification. If an agency requires internal reporting first, the information should be released as indicated above as soon as possible.

If there is uncertainty in the identity of the organism, the species identification should be confirmed by a third party prior to reporting to the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) Nonindigenous Aquatic Species (NAS) database (<http://nas.er.usgs.gov/SightingReport.asp>). The ANS Task Force maintains a directory of ANS experts (<http://www.anstaskforce.gov/experts/search.php>) who can assist in the identification of unknown or cryptic AIS. Reports to the USGS will initiate notification to registered users through the NAS Alert System and documents the person responsible for the first report.

Reports of new AIS on the USGS website should be considered as official records. The person or persons responsible for first reports to USGS should be acknowledged in scientific publications. The USGS normally withholds names from the records published on the website as a matter of privacy; however they do maintain a record of who filed the report. If the filer wishes to have their name displayed for purposes of credit for the report, the NAS staff will display that information upon request. The Panel believes this approach will acknowledge researchers in their AIS discoveries while expediting management actions for species that pose a threat to the Great Lakes region.