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Chair: Jim Grazio, Pennsylvania DEP
Vice Chair: Phil Moy, Wisconsin Sea Grant

Mr. Bryan Arroyo and Ms. Mary M. Glackin (Acting)
Co-Chairs, ANS Task Force
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
4401 North Fairfax Dr., Room 322
Arlington, VA 22203

February 12, 2010

Dear ANS Task Force Co-Chairs:

The Great Lakes Panel on Aquatic Nuisance Species (GLP) respectfully submits the attached position statement on the issue of aquatic invasive species (AIS) as related to renegotiation of the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement (Agreement). This Agreement between the U.S. and Canadian governments (the Parties) forms the binational basis for the protection of the physical, chemical, and biological integrity of the Great Lakes ecosystem. As you know, the GLP has been very active in binational efforts to foster coordination on AIS issues, and increased binational coordination continues to be needed.

The Parties have begun renegotiation of the Agreement, which was first signed in 1972 and last revised by protocol in 1987. The renegotiation process is being led by the U.S. Department of State and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade and Environment Canada. While the Agreement, from the beginning, has had an appropriate focus on water quality, there is very limited acknowledgment of the critical threat posed by aquatic invasive species to the biological integrity of the Great Lakes. Since the Agreement was last revised, a number of invasive species have become established in the lakes, including zebra and quagga mussels, round gobies, viral hemorrhagic septicemia and many others, all causing significant impacts to the ecosystem.

In the current first phase of the renegotiation process, the Parties will be determining revisions to the scope of the Agreement as related to governance issues. For this phase, the GLP has developed a consensus-based position statement recommending that amendments to the Agreement explicitly address the AIS issue. The position statement also recommends that the renegotiation process and the governance structure offer meaningful opportunities to engage with the various stakeholders in the region, including the Great Lakes Panel. This position statement on the AIS issue related to governance within the context of binational cooperation in the Great Lakes region will be formally submitted as comments to the Parties on behalf of the GLP. The second phase of the renegotiation process will be held later this year, providing an opportunity for public input that is specifically focused on environmental issues, namely ecosystem stressors. It should be noted that during this phase, the GLP plans to provide more detailed recommendations on the AIS component and its integration into the Agreement.

Advising the U.S. Department of State on international AIS matters is one of the chartered duties of the ANS Task Force. We respectfully request your consultation with the Department of State on this matter, considering the recommendations developed by the Great Lakes Panel in this position statement. We offer our ongoing support on this matter.

Sincerely,

Jim Grazio
Great Lakes Panel Chair
Pennsylvania Dept. of Environmental Protection, Great Lakes Biologist

Cc: Margaret M. (Peg) Brady, DOC/NOAA Liaison to the National Invasive Species Council & Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force

The Great Lakes Panel on Aquatic Nuisance Species

Position Statement on Governance Issues Involving the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement

February 2010

The Great Lakes Panel on Aquatic Nuisance Species¹ (Great Lakes Panel) commends the binational effort to renegotiate the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement (Agreement) in order to reflect the environmental realities of today. While the purpose of the Agreement to “restore and maintain the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the waters of the Great Lakes Basin Ecosystem” continues to remain a laudable goal, the current Articles and Annexes of the Agreement fail to adequately address the devastating impact of the introduction and spread of aquatic invasive species on the biological integrity of waters of the Great Lakes Basin. As the Agreement Review Committee noted in Volume I of its Report to the Great Lakes Binational Executive Committee, “[s]trong binational attention and coordination is critical for achieving any progress to control existing invasive species and prevent new invaders.”

The Great Lakes Panel, with binational representation, has been working for nearly two decades to coordinate the prevention and control of aquatic invasive species in the Great Lakes region. We offer our diverse institutional knowledge to assist in the renegotiation process and to help coordinate implementation of the revised Agreement. The Great Lakes Panel recommends that the revised Agreement explicitly address the problem of aquatic invasive species while providing clear management goals, objectives and accountability mechanisms. We also strongly recommend both the renegotiation process and the governance structure of the revised Agreement offer meaningful opportunities to coordinate, collaborate, consult, and engage with the various stakeholders in the region who are working on aquatic invasive species prevention and control. The Great Lakes Panel believes such provisions are necessary in order to more effectively protect and restore the integrity of the waters of the Great Lakes Basin Ecosystem from the often irreversible impacts of biological pollution.

¹ The Great Lakes Panel on Aquatic Nuisance Species was convened in 1991 under the auspices of the Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force as directed by Section 1203 of the Nonindigenous Aquatic Nuisance Prevention and Control Act of 1990 (P.L. 101-646). Though created through U.S. law, the Great Lakes Panel’s membership is binational, drawing from U.S. and Canadian federal agencies, tribal/First Nation authorities, the eight Great Lakes states and the provinces of Ontario and Québec, regional agencies and organizations, user (including conservation) groups, local communities, commercial interests, and the academic/research community.

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