



# Establishing an Aquatic Invasive Species Working Group for the North Central Region

## Background

Aquatic invasive species (AIS) have well-documented negative impacts on communities and aquatic ecosystems across the nation. AIS has been shown to reduce densities of desirable native species, impact regionally threatened and endangered species, and alter nutrient cycling and hydrology contributing to harmful algal blooms and the transmission of pathogens and parasites to native organisms.

Extension professionals are important resources at each level of addressing AIS issues, from helping state-level natural resource managers develop programs to meet their management objectives, to offering support and programming to communities to meet their local needs.

Unfortunately, although AIS and associated detrimental economic and ecological impacts are not limited to the Great Lakes Basin, engagement of Extension professionals in AIS issues in North Central Region states outside the Great Lakes Basin has been lacking. AIS readily spread to water bodies beyond the Great Lakes, which creates a need for widespread programming and management that does not currently exist.

With support from the North Central Region Water Network, a group of Extension professionals and AIS leaders formed a working group to fill this void by sharing existing AIS resources and broadening the aquatic invasive species network across the region.

## Goals

The goal of the AIS Working Group was to establish

and organize an Extension based network to focus on AIS issues in the North Central Region. Specific goals included:

- Connecting Extension professionals interested in AIS issues across the region to collectively address regional issues and take advantage of regional funding opportunities
- Collaborating with the Mississippi River Aquatic Nuisance Species Panel (MRBP) by appointing an Extension representative to further solidify engagement and facilitate connections between Extension and state-level AIS personnel and natural resource managers
- Engaging more citizens and natural resource managers in AIS management activities to prevent new AIS invasions

## Addressing the Challenge

Relevant Extension professionals involved in AIS and natural resource management across the region were identified and a regional AIS working group was established. The group developed a baseline understanding of what AIS programs are currently in place throughout the region and shared relevant AIS programs, projects, and news from each state.

The regional AIS working group met collectively prior to and attended the Upper Midwest Invasive Species Conference (UMISC) in October of 2016 to identify shared concerns and opportunities for network wide

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collaboration and generate a catalog of potential future joint projects. Additionally, the group participated in a live bait regulations workshop at the UMISC hosted by the MRBP and attended several MRBP meetings. As a result, a member of the AIS working group, Tim Campbell of the University of Wisconsin Extension, was elected to serve as co-chair for the MRBP serving a three-year term.

To engage additional professionals and natural resource managers in AIS efforts, members of the working group outlined AIS citizen science opportunities available in each state in a [North Central Region Water Network webinar](#) which has been viewed by over 150 individuals.

### Program Outcomes and Impacts

The AIS working group has a total of 18 members from across the region, representing individuals both within and outside the Great Lakes Basin. In addition to in-group collaboration, the group is now thoroughly engaged with the MRBP, who is committed to building capacity for more Extension work throughout its service area.

According to the end of project survey, 83% of working group members reported increasing their awareness of people in other states who are working on similar topics a 'large' or 'moderate' extent. 75% of respondents noted they increased their awareness of existing and ongoing Extension outreach focused on AIS and their impacts across the North Central Region a 'large' or 'moderate' extent. Furthermore, 85% of respondents felt the project increase the effectiveness of their state's efforts around AIS.

"Meeting at the Invasive Species conference and sharing ideas was very beneficial and we had great participation from our group"

"The most beneficial part of this project was getting to know people in other states that I could turn to for resources as my office increases its efforts in raising awareness about invasives"

"It's nice to have a group of people to bounce ideas off of. I have other existing networks that I can work with, but this group of statewide extension specialists who cover space outside of the Great Lakes region is unique"

### Moving Forward

The working group is continuing to collaborate and has created a listerv for ongoing communications. Collectively, they have a clear understanding of the current AIS programs in place throughout the region and are determined to learn from each other and apply for outside funding opportunities as they become available.

#### CONTACTS

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The North Central Region Water Network comprises 12 Land-grant colleges and universities:

