



ALASKA COMMITTEE FOR NOXIOUS & INVASIVE PLANT MANAGEMENT

January 15th, 2014
28th Legislature (2013-2014)

Representatives Bill Stoltze and Alan Austerman
Finance Committee Co-chairs
State of Alaska Legislative Offices
State Capitol Rooms 515, 505
Juneau, Alaska 99801

RE: CSHB89 - An Act relating to the rapid response to, and control of, aquatic invasive species and establishing the aquatic invasive species response fund - Referred to Finance on May 14th, 2013

Dear Representatives Stoltze and Austerman,

On behalf of the Alaska Committee for Noxious and Invasive Plant Management (CNIPM) I write to encourage the passage of House Bill 89.

House Bill 89, which would mandate a response coordinated by the Alaska Departments of Fish and Game (ADF&G), Environmental Conservation (ADEC) and Natural Resources (DNR) to aquatic invasive species, represents an important step toward developing rapid response capabilities for priority invasive species in Alaska. The CNIPM board commends the introduction of this bill by Representative Paul Seaton and its subsequent reference to Finance. We urge the House Finance Committee to hear this bill and vote to move it forward – remembering that its predecessor, HB365, was passed by the House with 37 “Yeas” on April 11, 2012.

Alaska is at a critical point with respect to aquatic invasive species. Currently, two species, the colonial tunicate *Didemnum vexillum* and the perennial waterweed, *Elodea* sp. pose considerable threat to our state’s marine and freshwater systems. *Didemnum vexillum* encrusts marine infrastructure and resident biota to drastically alter benthic habitats and potentially impact mariculture as well as shell and ground fisheries. The single known infestation discovered offshore from Sitka represents a dramatic and concerning 1,000 km range extension along the western coastline of North America.

While less than 20 non-native marine species have been documented in Alaskan waters, *Elodea* is the first non-native, submerged freshwater plant to be recorded in state. Through its aggressive growth, this perennial plant modifies flow and sedimentation rates in freshwater habitats, thus degrading the quality of spawning habitat for anadromous fish. The known distribution of *Elodea* is currently restricted to approximately 16 lakes and rivers in Anchorage, Fairbanks, Cordova and the Kenai Peninsula. However, several of the infested lakes accommodate float planes, which are potential vectors of introduction for *Elodea* to pristine waterbodies across the state, and with the exception of the Anchorage-area lakes, all infestations fall within the watersheds of the world-class Copper, Kenai or Yukon River fisheries.

Alaska’s commitment to invasive species funding is disproportionately low relative to federal levels. A recent study by UAA’s Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER) showed that from 2007-2011, 84% of invasive species funding for Alaska was provided by the federal government; the State of Alaska provided only 5%. Of an average annual expenditure of \$5.8 million for this same time period, only 10% of funding was directed towards the management of invasive marine species and freshwater plants. Based on this distribution of funding in the context of recent invasive species introductions, the study recommends that state government adopt a larger role in invasive species management.

It is our professional opinion that the type and level of response to aquatic invasive species in Alaska taken over the next few years holds high-stake implications for the ecological health of our waters and the manifold subsistence, commercial and recreational activities they support. House Bill 89 would



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facilitate the type of rapid, strategic and coordinated response necessary for the extirpation of *Didemnum vexillum* and *Elodea* from Alaska. As stewards of our Great Land, we urge you to support this crucial natural resource protection.

Please do not hesitate to contact us for further information or assistance.

Sincerely,

Lindsey Flagstad

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