



**Alaska Committee for Noxious
& Invasive Pest Management**

c/o UAF Cooperative Extension Service
1840 Bragaw St., Suite 100
Anchorage, AK 99508

April 10, 2017

Representative Garen Tarr
Alaska State Legislature
State Capitol, Room 126
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Representative Scott Kawasaki
Alaska State Legislature
State Capitol, Room 502
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Re: HB 177 – Aquatic Invasive Species

Dear Representatives Tarr and Kawasaki,

The Alaska Committee for Noxious and Invasive Pest Management (CNIPM) is the professional association for the management and study of invasive species in Alaska. CNIPM members represent local, State, and Federal governments; tribal; non-profit; university and private research groups; and private stakeholders. The mission of CNIPM is to raise awareness and facilitate statewide efforts to protect Alaska's resources from degradation by harmful invasive species. CNIPM would like to take this opportunity to express our strong support for HB 177, which will empower our state agencies to rapidly respond to an outbreak of aquatic invasive species.

Invasive species are defined by the harm they cause to natural resources, health, and/or economic values. Across the United States, invasive species cause hundreds of billions of dollars annually in crop losses, infrastructure damage, and ecological harm. UAA ISER (Institute for Social and Economic Research) researcher Tobias Schwoerer recently concluded that if Elodea, the submerged aquatic plant that threatens salmon spawning and rearing habitat, was allowed to become widespread, it would cost the Alaskan economy an estimated \$97 million per year! After several years of inaction, the State finally geared up and responded to Elodea and this extremely harmful plant is now believed to have been eradicated from three Kenai Peninsula and four Anchorage lakes. This bill will help prevent such costly delays from occurring in the future.

Alaska is lucky that our comparatively low population and extreme climate may have slowed down the arrival and establishment of invasive species, but some are already here and many more are knocking at our door.

Invasive species have been compared to a 'biological wildfire.' Just like a wildfire, its best to prevent it in the first place and secondarily to catch it and respond rapidly. Similarly, an invasive species outbreak is dramatically easier to control and eradicate early before it can grow larger and out of control. We understand that to be the intent of the bill – to prompt a rapid management response to an aquatic invasive species outbreak. We can do that with respect to fires and need to take a similar approach to invasive species.

While we enthusiastically support this bill and its intent, we have some general suggestions for improvement:

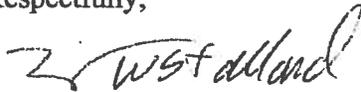
1. Alaska's relative geographic isolation helps make it possible for us to limit and prevent entry of invasive species; however, we are currently leaving the door wide open. In addition to watercraft arriving via the Alaska Marine Highway, other aquatic invasive species vectors should be addressed such as watercraft arriving via our land boarders and marine ports; arriving aircraft; imported materials, imported equipment; imported organisms; release of pets; aquaria dumping; and illegal stocking ('bucket biologists'). The outbreak of the invasive tunicate *D vex* in Sitka's Whiting harbor was likely caused by imported equipment that was infested with that invasive organism.
 - a. We should also address in-state movement of boats or equipment between waterbodies (for example 'boats and trailers leaving a water body are not allowed to leave the launch area with any attached vegetation or other aquatic organisms or without pulling their drain plugs AND boats, trailers, and other equipment are not allowed to enter another waterbody prior to being cleaned, drained, dried').
 - b. ADF&G, DNR, and other state agencies should have the authority to write regulations to rapidly respond to aquatic invasive species.
 - i. DNR and its Division of Agriculture are more than five years behind in updating their Regulations regarding plants legally sold in Alaska and continue to allow the sale of highly invasive species such as Reed canarygrass and American white waterlily. This is an example of where we need to do a better job of "Rapid Response."
2. Public education and outreach in addition to well-considered regulations are keys to preventing the spread of invasive species. We like that this bill speaks to the importance of public education and prevention to travellers on the Alaska Marine Highway system. That is a great example to include of an opportunity for public education regarding invasive species prevention, but we want to ensure that we don't limit ourselves there. We would like this bill to empower the Alaska Dept. of Fish and Game, DNR, DOT, and other agencies to educate the public via a variety of means and venues.

3. We also want to ensure that listing specific aquatic invasive species as examples, does not limit the intent of this bill. Additional example species that could be included are zebra & quagga mussels, New Zealand mud snail, carp, hydrilla, and Eurasian watermilfoil. Unfortunately in the future, new threats and currently unknown species may arrive. We suggest the following definition for HB 177:
 - a. Aquatic Invasive Species “means an aquatic species that is not native to Alaska, including their seeds, eggs, spores, larvae, or other biological material capable of propagation, and whose presence within Alaska may cause economic or environmental harm.”

All Alaskans care passionately about our natural resources because we rely on them for food, work, and fun. Invasive species threaten our resources and our way of life and we are not currently doing enough to protect our resources from these threats. So we are grateful to see this bill, which should create the impetus and mechanisms for our state agencies and partners to rapidly and effectively address aquatic invasive species threats.

Thank you again to you and your colleagues for working on this bill, which we note has had strong bipartisan support in its past iterations. We sincerely hope this is the Legislative Session in which HB 177 - the Aquatic Invasive Species bill makes it across the finish line! Please let us know if we can provide any additional information related to this issue.

Respectfully,



Tim Stallard,
CNIPM Board Chair

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