



CESU Final Report Summary for *Potential Effects of Aquatic Nuisance Species on the Behavior of Recreational Anglers, Boaters, and Beachgoers - W912HZ-11-2-0030 (Report B)*

Purpose: This report summarizes the findings from a series of focus groups conducted as part of the United States Army Corps of Engineers/Cornell University “Recreation Impacts of Aquatic Nuisance Species to the Great Lakes and Mississippi River Basins” cooperative agreement. The overall purpose was to describe how and why aquatic nuisance species in the Upper Mississippi River, Ohio River, and Great Lakes basins may affect recreational behaviors of angler, boaters, and beachgoers. Understanding the ways that recreationists may respond to the presence of aquatic nuisance species and the particular effects of these species that may lead to this response is necessary for understanding the impacts of aquatic nuisance species on recreationists. This work will be used as a foundation for later research on the economic impacts of aquatic nuisance species on recreationists.

Location: Upper Mississippi River, Ohio River, and Great Lakes basins.

Methods: Eight focus groups were conducted with anglers, three with recreational boaters, and three with recreational beachgoers.

Results: A number of factors, including, but not limited to aquatic nuisance species, influenced the recreational behavior of anglers, boaters, and beachgoers. In each user group, the factors cited most often by focus group participants as affecting fishing, boating, and beachgoing behavior were related to the potential effects of aquatic nuisance species. Anglers expressed concerns about catch rate and fish size—and fishing quality more generally—based on impacts from aquatic nuisance species. Secondary effects of aquatic nuisance species—such as the inconvenience or expense of shifting fishing location—were also described. Other influences on behavior were identified that did not link to aquatic nuisance species (e.g., weather, access to fishing sites, social relationships). Boater and beachgoer behavior were tied to aquatic nuisance species-related issues such as water clarity, health and safety, and visual beauty.

Most of the potential impacts of aquatic nuisance species on recreation seemed to be negative, such as limiting the number of locations in which recreation is desirable, causing some forms of recreation to become more difficult, less fun, or less safe, and perhaps leading some people to forsake certain activities altogether. Nevertheless, a few impacts from aquatic nuisance species could be positive. For example, the increased water clarity provided by zebra mussels appealed to many focus group participants.

Even though the focus group participants seemed to be affected primarily negatively by aquatic nuisance species, they frequently showed a willingness to adapt rather than becoming

frustrated to the point that they would cease participation entirely. Substituting different locations or forms of preferred recreational activities (e.g., types of fishing, uses of beaches, etc.) for current ones was a frequently cited approach to dealing with aquatic nuisance species. Recreationists repeatedly asserted that they would adapt and continue to recreate, even if it left them with a diminished experience.

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