



Recommendation to the Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force to secure and restore previous levels of funding to the regional panels: The Mid-Atlantic Panel on Aquatic Invasive Species requests that the ANS Task Force restore at least \$10,000 in additional funding to each of the regional panels, bringing them to the original \$50,000 in annual support, and that the Task Force work to secure additional and dedicated sources of financial support for the regional panels.

Prior to FY2014, \$50,000 annually was authorized by the Nonindigenous Aquatic Nuisance Prevention and Control Act of 1990 and allocated to each of the six regional panels through the US Fish and Wildlife Service budget. Reduction of that funding to \$40,000 per panel since 2014 constitutes a 20 percent reduction of the federal funds supporting each panel, with significant adverse impact.

The panels are multistate organizations whose most basic activities involve serving as a coordinating body and liaison serving the private, institutional, state, and federal panel member organizations regarding aquatic invasive species; attendance at two Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force meetings and two regional panel meetings each year; planning, convening, and hosting the regional panel meetings and associated conference calls; and paying staff or contractors to manage the panels' activities. While these activities are essential to maintenance of an effective organization, they do not even address the invasive species management, scientific research, and public education activities that comprise the essential and innovative work of the respective panels. Indeed, at each of its semiannual meetings, the Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force recognizes the work and accomplishments of the regional panels; work that was recently detailed in the Task Force's Report to Congress.

While serving as an effective interagency forum and liaison for Washington, D.C. and the eight states comprising our region, the Mid-Atlantic Panel has promoted innovative research, public education, specialized professional training, and on-the-ground AIS management projects through our annual Small Grants Competition. Indeed, since 2007 the Panel has awarded \$348,684 in 36 small grants addressing a wide range of AIS management needs and leveraging over half a million dollars in partner funds, including such diverse projects as development and regional distribution of an invasive species toolkit for educators, eDNA monitoring of *Didymosphenia geminata* (didymo) in the mid-Atlantic, development of the West Virginia Invasive Species Management Plan, and development of the Virginia Strategic Plan for eradicating nutria.

As testimony to the continuing success and interest in this program, in 2014 the Panel received 18 grant proposals requesting \$242,884, and allocated \$34,000 to fund three

proposals from that year's grant competition: (1) characterization of the invasive New Zealand mud snail population in central Pennsylvania; (2) a cooperative MAPAIS project with the National Sea Grant Law Center, the National Association of Attorneys General, and the Environmental Law Institute to improve regional understanding of strategies available to facilitate agency access to private land for eradication and control of aquatic nuisance species; and (3) expansion of the Pennsylvania Field Guide to Aquatic Invasive Species (also partially funded through MAPAIS) into a regional AIS field guide covering approximately 100 invasive species threatening the Mid-Atlantic Region. In 2015, we funded rebuilding and upgrading of our MAPAIS website; awarded supplemental funding to print the Mid-Atlantic Guide to Aquatic Invasive Species upon completion of that project; and funded a new project to train conservation working dogs for early detection of nutria (*Myocaster coypus*) in Virginia, and to evaluate their effectiveness under various field conditions. We have received eight new proposals requesting \$94,039 in response to our 2016 Request For Proposals, and we will review and fund projects among these recent proposals later this month at our semi-annual MAPAIS spring meeting.

In summary, the Mid-Atlantic Panel has recognized the urgent need expressed by agencies, academic institutions, civic and educational organizations, and private interests for financial assistance in developing and implementing on-the-ground efforts to eradicate or manage aquatic invasive species, and to educate our citizens regarding the ecological and economic hazards represented by these invaders. The great majority of our federally-derived funding has been awarded annually to "seed" such projects, with dramatically successful results that then serve as inspiration for other initiatives. The fact that fewer than 25 percent of the applicants for our small grants receive funding, despite the demonstrated value of their proposals, illustrates the need for continuation and expansion of this program, at least to its former level of funding from the USFWS.

Restoring the previous level of funding for the six regional panels would cost only \$60,000 nationally. The Mid-Atlantic Panel on Aquatic Invasive Species recommends that the Task Force secure \$60,000 and restore this funding immediately, and initiate discussions to identify and secure additional dedicated sources of financial support for the regional panels, so that the panels may continue to provide the valuable services and products for which they were tasked by the Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force.

Approved by the Mid-Atlantic Panel on Aquatic Invasive Species Executive Committee for presentation to the Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force.