



ORGANIZING A ZEBRA MUSSEL TASK FORCE

A blueprint for success

State and Regional Task Forces: An Effective Approach to Addressing the Zebra Mussel Problem

Outreach and education have been proven to be necessary tools for combating the zebra mussel invasion in North America. These tools can be used to develop statewide or regional preparedness programs for areas already infested with zebra mussels, as well as for places where zebra mussels have yet to be detected. Although several mid-Atlantic and southern states have used extension programs to prepare interest groups for the possible arrival of the zebra mussel, most states don't focus on the mussels until they appear. An adequate preparedness program can offer substantial benefits in the long run.

A successful education and outreach program must target a wide range of people. Because of the vast number of groups that may be affected by zebra mussels, it is difficult for a single state agency to coordinate a comprehensive program. A zebra mussel task force, composed of members from fields and occupations involved with the issue, can reach all potentially impacted parties with up-to-date zebra mussel information.

This fact sheet addresses the purpose and need of zebra mussel task forces and outlines how to recruit, organize and operate such a program.

Purpose

A task force should be a group of people whose common goal is to coordinate the exchange of zebra mussel information. Task forces may be statewide or regional, as long as they are geared toward zebra mussel issues relevant to the area. In some cases, the task force may act as an advisory committee for an existing outreach program that targets numerous audiences. Or the task force could serve as an emergency response unit in the event that zebra mussels arrive. In other cases, the task force may be a temporary working group focusing on an issue of limited scope and time span.

Objectives

A zebra mussel task force can address a variety of objectives critical to the state or region. As outreach advisory groups, many task forces identify information needs and target audiences. With the guidance of a small task force, the Michigan Sea Grant Program developed a zebra mussel packet designed to educate their state legislators. The packet contained recommendations for a statewide policy that would prevent the spread of zebra mussels to inland water bodies.

Similarly, Connecticut Sea Grant worked with its Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force to educate state legislators and lake associations about zebra mussels. The task force focused on educational programs designed to prevent the introduction and spread of zebra mussels to Connecticut's inland lakes.

Task forces may also help identify outlets for information dispersal. For example, many boating groups teach boating safety courses and are happy to include zebra mussel information in their programs. Utility companies in several states distribute information about zebra mussels and other exotic species along with their billing information. State and federal agencies and industries have distributed information to the public and to field personnel who are likely to be the first to encounter the mussel.

The purpose of a task force might be to establish an inventory of monitoring sites. Sea Grant programs in New Jersey and Delaware worked together to organize a task force that established a comprehensive monitoring network for the Delaware River basin. The task force included representatives from New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Delaware. The resulting monitoring network, which includes citizens and industry representatives, will provide an early warning if zebra mussels appear in the Delaware River. In addition, the New Jersey Sea Grant Program has a task force that provides continuous guidance to its existing outreach program. Task force members from Pennsylvania and New Jersey provide input through biannual meetings.

Other task forces may choose objectives such as promoting the research and devel-

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opment of zebra mussel detection, prevention and control methods or developing and promoting standard control or monitoring protocols.

Membership

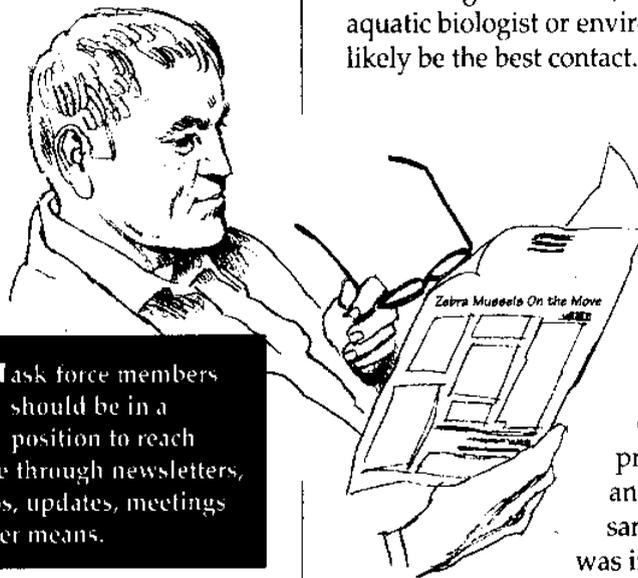
A task force should include representation from all who will be affected by a zebra mussel invasion: those who can spread the mussel; those who might encounter the mussel first; those who can easily communicate warnings or information about the mussel; and those who can take official action concerning zebra mussels.

The task force's representation and size must be tailored to the group's goals and activities. If regular meetings and an active agenda are anticipated, a small group of decision-makers from key segments of the affected population can accomplish these objectives efficiently. If simple information dissemination and outreach are anticipated, a broad representation and a large task force may be more successful.

All task force members should be appointed with the understanding that they have an overall responsibility to reach people through newsletters, memos, updates, meetings or other means. Members should be selected on the basis that their position enables

them to reach a large portion of their constituency, industry or field. For example, it would be more effective to select a coordinator of a regional water authority or the head of an aquaculture association than the operator of a single water treatment plant or an aquaculture farmer. Other key members could include a state or regional coordinator for the U.S. Power Squadron or U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary, the head of a key sportfishing or marina association or the organizer for a large-scale shoreline cleanup.

In some areas, industrial coalitions or trade associations may unite several small companies, providing a strong link to water-dependent industries. Trade association newsletters usually contain legislative alerts, news of new products or a solution to a common problem. Links to this kind of information transfer could provide an effective avenue for zebra mussel outreach. A representative of the Farm Bureau, for example, may



Task force members should be in a position to reach people through newsletters, memos, updates, meetings or other means.

keep farmers that use irrigation informed through a monthly newsletter.

In selecting industry and agency representatives, the person's department and area of expertise should also be considered. State and federal agency representatives should be recruited from water resources, environmental management, aquatic ecology, fisheries and wildlife management, conservation and agriculture. Supervisors of field biologists; inspectors for aquatic species population evaluations, endangered species investigations, water quality sampling and aquatic invertebrate inventories; or recreational and park area managers can be strong connections in an early-warning network. A nonindigenous species coordinator would be a valuable recruit if such a position exists within an agency. In the case of large industries, such as power companies, an aquatic biologist or environmental coordinator would likely be the best contact.

Organization

Task forces can be organized several ways. One option is to work with leading state agencies to identify and recruit appropriate members. In North Carolina, the Division of Water Resources had programs designed to eradicate and prevent the spread of nuisance aquatic weeds. This division was instrumental in identifying

potential members for the task force and drawing them to an initial meeting. The Louisiana Sea Grant Program worked with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to organize a one-day informational workshop to raise awareness of zebra mussels and stimulate interest in the issue. The afternoon portion of the workshop was used to assemble a task force for the lower Mississippi River.

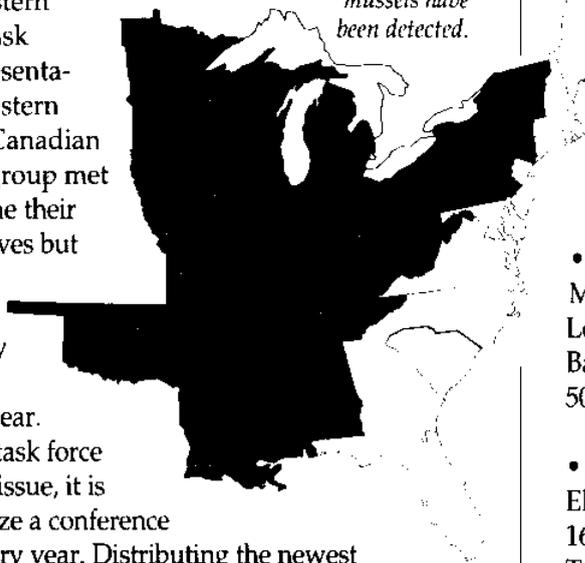
The initial meeting of the task force should be used to identify the group's goals and objectives. One member or organization should be elected as the chair. This person will maintain connections with the national zebra mussel network and serve as a clearinghouse of information for the task force.

Regular meetings may be too demanding for task force members scattered across a state or region. Newsletters, memos, conference calls, electronic mail and the World Wide Web are alternative methods of transferring information. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's

Nonindigenous Species Coordinator in Colorado organized a Western Zebra Mussel Task Force with representatives from 17 western states and four Canadian provinces. The group met initially to outline their goals and objectives but meets in subgroups or communicates by other means throughout the year.

To keep the task force interested in the issue, it is helpful to organize a conference or workshop every year. Distributing the newest education materials will also help to keep the group up-to-date. New mussel sightings, advances in control strategies, research findings, upcoming conferences, monitoring techniques and legislative action should be included in task force updates. In addition, task force members should submit relevant information and new data to be included. Members' phone numbers should also be circulated to the group to encourage interaction among the task force.

Shaded states contain waters where zebra mussels have been detected.



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For More Information

Although your group may want to develop regional publications, many materials are available through Sea Grant programs of the Great Lakes, Northeast and Mid-Atlantic regions. For Sea Grant numbers or more information, contact the National Sea Grant College Program office at 301/713-2431. Existing zebra mussel task forces can provide you with information and assistance. World Wide Web sites are also excellent sources of information. Examples include Zebra Mussel Information Resources, at <http://www.nfrcg.gov/zebra.mussel/>, and The Zebra Mussel Page, at <http://.science.wayne.edu/~jram/zmussel.html>.



— Barbara Doll, Water Quality Specialist
North Carolina Sea Grant

Selected Zebra Mussel Task Forces

- **Lower Mississippi River Zebra Mussel Task Force**

John Forester, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Natchitoches Fisheries Assistant Office
237 Parker Coliseum, Louisiana State University
Baton Rouge, LA 70803
504/388-4243

- **Louisiana Sea Grant College Program**

Marilyn Barrett O'Leary
Louisiana State University
Baton Rouge, LA 70803
504/388-6349

- **New Jersey Zebra Mussel Monitoring Task Force**

Eleanor Bochenek, New Jersey Sea Grant Program
1623 Whitesville Road
Toms River, NJ 08755
908/349-1152

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Sources to Consider When Assembling A Task Force

- Trade associations/industrial coalitions
 - Aquaculture operations
 - Irrigators
- Municipal water treatment plants
 - Extension personnel
 - Boating organizations
 - Marina associations
- Sportfishing organizations
- Shoreline cleanup organizations
- Neighboring states or regions
- Water-dependent industries
(chemical companies, power companies and processing plants)
 - Federal and state agencies
(environmental, fisheries and wildlife/conservation, water resources and agriculture)



• **Connecticut Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force**

Nancy Balcom, Connecticut Sea Grant
University of Connecticut
1084 Shennecossett Road
Groton, CT 06340
860/445-3455

• **The Western Zebra Mussel Task Force**

Linda Drees, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Fisheries and Federal Aid
PO Box 25486, Denver Federal Center
Denver, CO 80228
303/236-8154

• **Michigan Sea Grant Zebra Mussel Working Group**

John Schwartz, Michigan Sea Grant
334 Natural Resource Building, Michigan State
University
East Lansing, MI 48824
517/353-9748

• **North Carolina Zebra Mussel Task Force**

Barbara Doll, North Carolina Sea Grant
Box 8605, N.C. State University
Raleigh, NC 27695
919/515-2454

• **Delaware River Zebra Mussel Monitoring Task Force**

Eleanor Bochenek, New Jersey Sea Grant Program
1623 Whitesville Road
Toms River, NJ 08755
908/349-1152

• **Delaware Sea Grant Program**

Jim Falk
700 Pilottown Road
Lewes, DL 19958
302/645-4235

