

Written Testimony to the House of Representatives  
Appropriations Committee  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies

By  
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My name is Ron Brooks. I am the Director of the Fisheries Bureau for the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources. I am here today on behalf of the Mississippi Interstate Cooperative Resource Association – an interstate partnership known as MICRA – to provide testimony on the priorities and budget of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, in particular the Resource Management appropriations for Fisheries and Aquatic Conservation Program.

MICRA is an organization of my fellow state agency fish chiefs in the 28 states that have management jurisdiction of the fisheries resources in the Mississippi River Basin. The Mississippi River Basin states formed the MICRA partnership in 1990 to cooperatively manage the interjurisdictional fisheries and aquatic resources in the basin, and to address the basin-wide challenges and barriers impacting these resources.

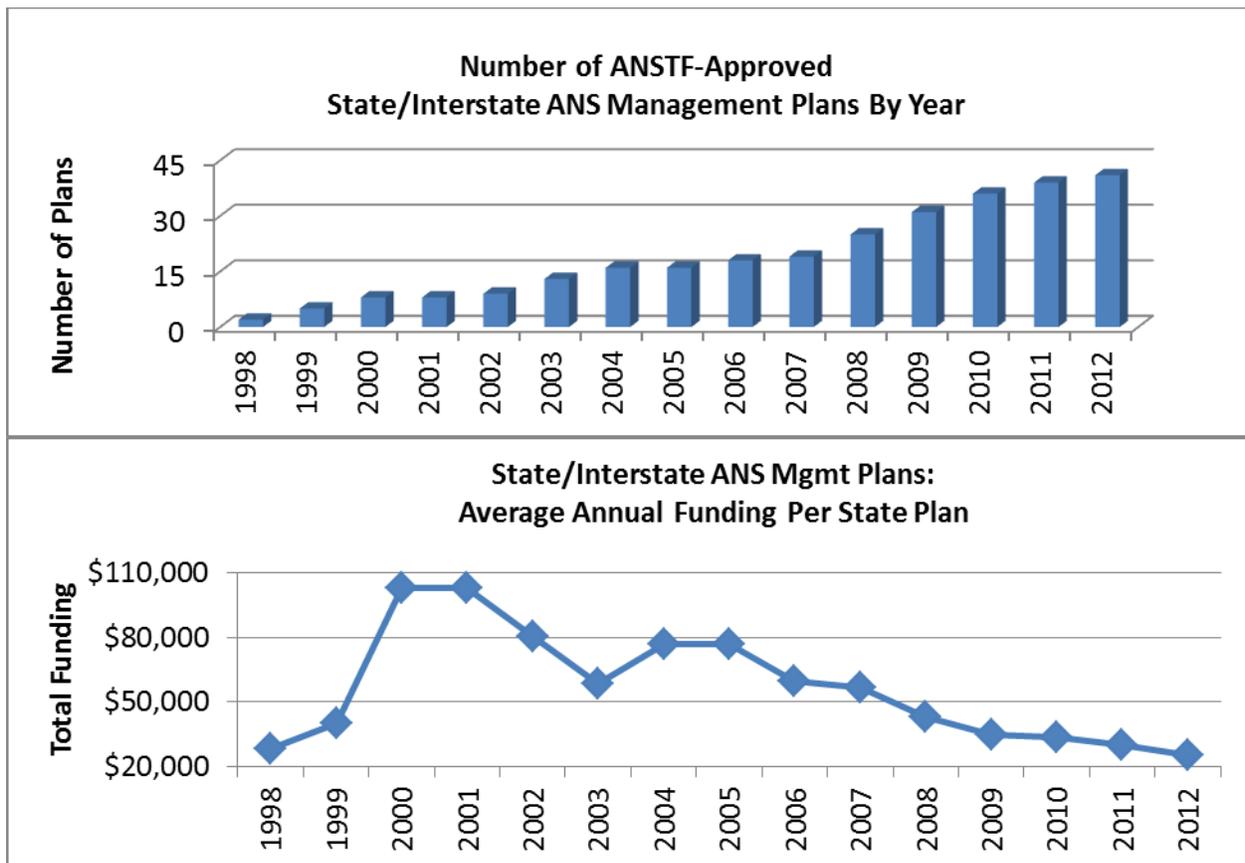
MICRA supports the increases in the President's Budget for the National Fish Hatchery System, and the Aquatic Habitat and Species Conservation Program. Two of the primary basin-wide issues impacting our native fisheries and aquatic resources are the loss of diverse habitats and aquatic nuisance species. The National Fish Hatchery System mitigation program, Fish Passage program, and the National Fish Habitat Partnerships are all programs that MICRA strongly supports and would like to see remain priorities for the Service and Congress.

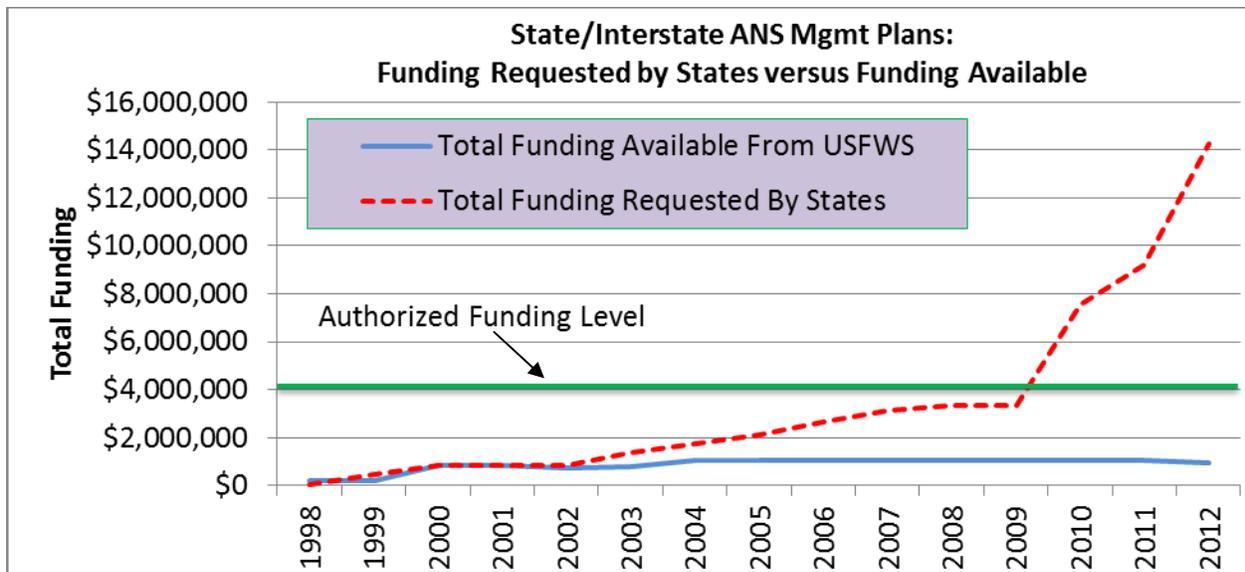
I will focus the remainder of my comments today on the issue of Aquatic Nuisance Species, which I will refer to as ANS. ANS impact water resources, businesses, waterway users, native ecosystems, and the public in every state throughout the Nation. Management and control of nuisance fish – such as Asian carps and lion fish; mussels – such as quagga mussels, zebra mussels, New Zealand mud snails, and apple snails; plants such as Brazillian elodea, water hyacinth, and Eurasian water milfoil; and a plethora of other organisms cost the United States billions of dollars each year.

The Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force (ANSTF), composed of 13 Federal and 12 ex-officio organizations, serves as the only intergovernmental organization dedicated to preventing and controlling aquatic nuisance species. The ANSTF provides a national forum for collaboration on critical issues that can impact prevention, control, and management of ANS. Regional coordination among Federal, State, and local partner is accomplished through the work of six Regional Panels. MICRA is an ex-officio member on the ANS Task Force and the host organization for the Mississippi River Basin Panel on Aquatic Nuisance Species – the largest Regional Panel in the country.

As part of the federal – state partnership to address this immense issue, the states have produced ANS management plans that identify needed actions to address each state’s priority ANS issues. Funding for implementation of ANS Task Force approved state and interstate ANS management plans through the USFWS is authorized at \$4 million through the Nonindigenous Aquatic Nuisance Prevention and Control Act of 1990. Funding for state ANS management plans allows states to leverage funds and implement the highest priority actions to prevent the continued spread of ANS and minimize their impacts on the public.

Appropriations for state ANS management plans have consistently remained around \$1 million since first authorized at \$4 million. As the number of approved state ANS management plans has increased each year, the amount of funding received by each states has steadily decreased. There are now 42 ANS Task Force approved state and interstate ANS management plans. Funding levels have fallen from more than \$100,000 per approved plan in FY2000 and FY2001, to less than \$24,000 per plan in FY2015, severely limiting the ability of states to effectively manage ANS. The total funding requested by states to implement approved plans was more than \$14,000,000 in FY2012. This increase of \$3 million for implementation of approved state and interstate ANS management plans critically needed and long overdue. It is an investment in the states’ collective ability to prevent introductions of new ANS and manage and control existing ANS populations that cause millions of dollars in losses each year.





In particular, Asian carp have been spreading throughout much of the Mississippi River Basin over the past two decades impacting new waters each year. The states assisted the USFWS in the development of a national Asian carp management and control plan that was approved by the national ANS Task Force in 2007. The Mississippi River Basin states have long advocated for national strategies to prevent and control Asian carps, recognizing that comprehensive efforts to address Asian carp throughout the Mississippi River Basin are necessary to achieve success in preventing Asian carp from becoming established in the Great Lakes, Upper Mississippi River, upper Ohio River basins and elsewhere. Congress has made a significant investment over the last several years to prevent Asian carp from becoming established in the Great Lakes, first through Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (or GLRI) funding and more recently through base funding allocations to federal agencies.

There has been a steady shift from the use of GLRI funds to federal agency base funds to address Asian carp prevention and control in the Great Lakes. The President’s FY2016 Budget includes an important increase in Asian Carp funding to transition the USFWS completely away from the use of GLRI funds for Asian carp work. MICRA strongly supports this recommended funding increase to enable the USFWS to lead national efforts to manage and control Asian carps in the United States. As proposed, the USFWS FY2016 Asian carp allocations would be divided with nearly \$5.5 million dedicated to preventing Asian carp from becoming established in the Great Lakes, and only about \$2.5 million dedicated to preventing establishment and controlling established populations outside the Great Lakes. Greater focus on national priorities and increased funding for Asian carp prevention and control beyond the Great Lakes is desperately needed. The Mississippi River Basin alone drains all or part of 31 states and 2 Canadian Provinces. In addition to protecting uninvaded waters in every Mississippi River Basin state, many states in the Mississippi River Basin are attempting to reduce established populations of Asian carp and minimize their impacts on the businesses and recreational users that rely on these waters.

Beginning in FY2014 the USFWS began receiving a small amount of base funding to address Asian carp outside the Great Lakes, however this funding was focused on preventing Asian carp from becoming established in the Upper Mississippi River and Ohio River basins. The FY2016 President's Budget includes an important modification that expands the use of these funds to the "Mississippi River and tributaries." While perhaps not meant as geographic restrictions, the USFWS continues to interpret appropriations language such as "Great Lakes and areas outside of the Great Lakes, including the upper Mississippi and Ohio River basins" as geographic restrictions and fails to implement a national strategy for this national issue. MICRA urges Congress to remove the language interpreted by the USFWS as geographic restrictions on the use of these funds in FY2016 appropriations language and authorize the use of Asian carp appropriations "for the implementation of national priorities based on the national Asian Carp Management and Control Plan, and implemented through regional or local Action Plans stepped down from the nationally approved plan."

The Regional Frameworks/Action Plans for the Mississippi River Basin were developed with flexibility to use creative solutions to control existing populations of Asian carp and prevent further range expansion. Much of the work identified in the Asian Carp Regional Frameworks/Action Plans for the Mississippi River, Ohio River, and other parts of the Mississippi River Basin are state-led actions. The states are critical partners to the federal agencies in the battle against Asian carp, but most states lack funding to implement actions and address priority needs. Federal funding directly to states for implementation of priority actions in support of the National Asian Carp Management and Control Plan, and Regional Frameworks/Action Plans is critically needed for engagement of states as partners in addressing Asian carp. Funding increases to Federal agencies for Asian carp should include a specific amount or a percentage increase for pass through to states for implementation of state-led priority needs identified in Asian Carp Regional Frameworks/Action Plans.

I am happy to provide clarification or additional information to the Subcommittee or its individual members regarding any of MICRA's recommendations presented in this written testimony.

Sincerely,

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