

Addressing Aquatic Invasive Species: Survey Results from Organisms-in-Trade Hobbyists in Wisconsin

A Fact Sheet Generated for Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant

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Project Overview

Aquatic invasive species (AIS) threaten native ecosystems, damage infrastructure and personal property, and diminish recreational experiences. Although many vectors of AIS exist, the role of hobbyists involved in the organisms-in-trade (OIT) industry (i.e., aquarium hobbyists, outdoor pond owners, and water gardeners) is not well known. This fact sheet provides an overview of findings from survey research conducted with OIT hobbyists in the Great Lakes region and provides recommendations for future educational outreach campaigns.

Project Goals

The overall goals of this study were to: (a) assess OIT hobbyist familiarity (i.e., knowledge and awareness) of AIS; (b) identify common information sources; (c) document current aquatic procurement and disposal behaviors; and (d) identify motivators and barriers to performing behaviors recommended to prevent the spread of AIS. This fact sheet provides an overview of survey results from 2 sampling events (one aquarium hobbyist and one water gardener or outdoor pond event in Wisconsin; n=101).

Research Methods

A survey questionnaire was distributed to self-identified OIT hobbyists at the 16 OIT events in the Great Lakes Region between February and September 2013. A list of annual OIT events (i.e., auctions, trade shows, and expos) in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin was developed. Researchers attended one aquarium related event and one outdoor pond or water garden related event in each of the eight states. Strategic sampling was employed to select events based on OIT industry, event coordinators willingness to allow researcher presence, and date of show within study timeframe. All event attendees approaching the research booth were asked to participate. The sampling events summarized in this fact sheet are the Wisconsin Garden Expo (February 8-10, 2013) and the Green Bay Aquarium Society Auction (March 3, 2013).

Wisconsin Results

Of the 121 event attendees asked to participate at events in Wisconsin, 101 completed surveys were obtained (83% response rate). Most respondents owned an aquarium, either as their sole hobby or in combination with water gardening or tending an outdoor pond (Fig. 1).

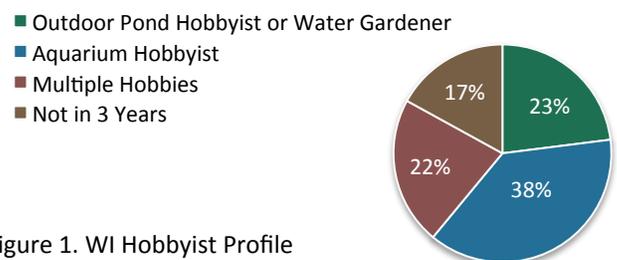


Figure 1. WI Hobbyist Profile

Nearly one-half of respondents were over the age of 50 (45%) and 54% were male. The majority of respondents had completed at least a 4-year college degree (54%). Additionally, nearly half of respondents (47%) reported receiving past information about AIS. The most frequently cited information source was hobbyist magazines (53%; Table 1).

Almost one-half of respondents reported being aware of AIS (45%) and the majority of respondents reported being concerned about the spread of AIS (67%).

Table 1. AIS Information Sources*

Magazines	58%
Television	53%
Newspaper	50%
Online water hobbyist forums	32%
School	32%
Purchases	13%

*N=38 (number of respondents who received AIS information)

Nearly one-half of participants have received information about AIS in the past (47%). Yet, nearly one-third (30%) report not having enough information to prevent the spread of AIS.

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Procurement Behaviors & Barriers

The majority of respondents (52%) have made purchase decisions with preventing the spread of AIS in mind and on average, respondents were “very likely” to make future purchase decisions with preventing the spread of AIS in mind. Additionally, the majority of respondents (55%) “agree” that they trust local retailers and nearly half (49%) “agree” that they do not know if their dealer is licensed. A comparison of past performance and behavioral intention of recommended procurement behaviors between respondents at Wisconsin events and respondents from all 16 events is provided in Table 2.

Table 2. Performance of Recommended Procurement Behaviors

Behavior	Past Performance		Future Likelihood ^a	
	WI	Overall	WI ^b	Overall
Avoid purchasing known AIS	83%	72%	4.51	4.12
Purchase native plants ^c	73%	72%	4.32	4.15
Purchase non-weedy plants ^c	74%	72%	4.23	3.98
Buy from a reputable local dealer	88%	90%	4.19	4.18
Tell other hobbyists not to release	54%	67%	4.10	4.17
Buy from a reputable online dealer	27%	38%	2.81	3.00
Accept unwanted species from others	22%	36%	2.80	2.94

^aResponses based on five-point scale from 1 (not at all likely) to 5 (extremely likely).

^bFriedman tests show respondents are more likely to perform behaviors on the top of the list in the future.

^cOnly respondents owning water gardens or outdoor ponds were asked this questionnaire item.

The majority of respondents feel a strong, personal obligation to prevent the spread of AIS (85%) and are willing to put extra effort into preventing the spread of AIS (92%).

Disposal Behaviors & Barriers

The majority of respondents (70%) have made disposal decisions with preventing the spread of AIS in mind and on average, respondents were “very likely” to make future disposal decisions with preventing the spread of AIS in mind. Some misinformation exists about proper disposal, as almost half of respondents (48%) prefer to compost their aquatic plants over other disposal practices, a behavior that is not recommended. A comparison of past performance and behavioral intention of recommended disposal behaviors between respondents at Wisconsin events and respondents from all 16 events is provided in Table 3.

Table 3. Performance of Recommended Disposal Behaviors

Behavior	Past Performance		Future Likelihood ^a	
	WI	Overall	WI ^b	Overall
Avoid release into the environment	71%	73%	4.16	4.10
Contact a retailer for handling advice	24%	19%	3.34	2.52
Contact another hobbyist to give or trade	45%	65%	3.23	3.59
Seal aquatic plants in plastic bags prior to disposal	29%	33%	2.97	3.02
Donate unwanted species to a school or business	20%	32%	2.56	2.81

^aResponses based on a five-point scale from 1 (not at all likely) to 5 (extremely likely).

^bFriedman tests show respondents are more likely to perform behaviors on the top of the list in the future.

Campaign Materials & Recommended Strategies

Respondents rated informative campaign pamphlets included with purchases, informative campaign posters placed throughout the store, and informational booths with examples of known AIS at OIT events as “very” effective campaign materials. Additionally, respondents rated smartphone Apps, podcasts, and give-away items at the least effective educational campaign materials. The behaviors that would require less outreach effort are those that most hobbyists have performed in the past and are “very likely” to perform in the future (i.e., Future Likelihood mean greater than 3.5; Tables 2 & 3). Enhancing the adoption of other behaviors (i.e., Future Likelihood mean less than 3.5; Tables 2 & 3) will require additional outreach effort.

Most respondents (85%) believe that retailers are responsible for educating the public on ways to prevent the spread of AIS.

Water Garden/Pond Specific Behaviors & Barriers

On average, respondents who owned a water garden or outdoor pond were “very likely” to choose a location for their water feature away from flood prone areas and natural waterways. Additionally, more than half (59%) reported being unfamiliar with the practice of rinsing plants in a bucket until clean of attached dirt and debris.