

**Talking Points for Dr. James Tate, Jr.
Science Advisor, U.S. Department of the Interior
At the Potomac River Northern Snakehead Roundup**

Friday, July 30, 2004

- Why **are** we here today? Is it because of what I have heard—“that a bad day fishing is better than a good day at work?”
- Maybe. I can tell you that there are several reasons I am here, and another chance to fish is only one of them.
- The **first** reason I am pleased to be here today is to commend all the partners who put this event together. And, to commend all of the partners who have been at our side since the first snakehead crisis in Maryland two years ago. This is a chance to promote Secretary Norton's "4Cs" philosophy – communication, cooperation, and consultation, all in the service of conservation.
- **Second**, I am here because this event is a great opportunity for increasing awareness about invasive fishes, and about what we can all accomplish when we work together.
- **Third**, it gives me a chance to talk about the difference between invasive species and non-native species.
- **And**, it gives me a chance to point out that in the modern world there are many ways to introduce new species- this is not a hunt for the guilty, it is a plea for education, understanding and cooperation.
- To me an “**invasive species**” is not native to an established biological community, **and** which when introduced is likely to cause economic or environmental harm, or harm to human health.
- Not all non-native species are invasive. Many non-native species are important sources of food, fiber and recreation- crops, flowers and landscaping plants, pets, and even microbes [yeast for example].
- Northern snakeheads are likely an invasive species that can cause a great deal of harm to a watershed like the Potomac.
- Sometimes purposeful introductions start off well, and then become a problem...take for example the silver carp that escaped from aquaculture into the Mississippi River System. It is becoming famous for jumping out of the water and smacking fisherman in the head.
- Many species of carp, including our old acquaintance *Cyprinus carpio* were brought in intentionally, raised right here on the mall, distributed throughout our nation at the turn of the last century, and now cause problems in many parts of the U.S.
- Many other species right here in the Potomac are not native to this watershed. Only a small fraction of non-native species that are introduced to a new environment even become established and less than 10% of those species are considered invasive.

- In fact, the Northern snakehead is a respected food source in its native range, it is even sought after by International Sport Fishermen and women, and it may sometimes be kept as an ornamental fish in aquaria.
- Despite what you read and hear in the media, we don't know for sure if the Northern snakehead will become invasive and cause great harm. Scientists at Interior's USGS, Walter Courtenay and Jim Williams, have analyzed the risk for 26 members of the genus *Channa*.
- They report that the probability of a species of *Channa* coming to a stream near you, surviving, colonizing and reproducing, and causing economic dislocations is **HIGH – VERY CERTAIN**.
- Only the likelihood of a colonizing group spreading beyond the colonized area is less: **HIGH – REASONABLY CERTAIN**.
- Clearly introducing the Northern Snakehead into the Potomac, or into a watershed near Philadelphia as was discovered this week, cross the invasive line and will upset the established and hurt the whole environment and other species present in it.
- In 2002, the Department of the Interior, under the leadership of Secretary Gale Norton, added the family of snakeheads, comprised of 29 species, to the Federal list of "injurious wildlife" under the Lacey Act—because these fish have been found to be harmful to our watersheds.
- The Lacey Act authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to list non-indigenous wild animals deemed to be "injurious, or potentially injurious, to the health and welfare of people as well as to the interests of agriculture, forestry, and horticulture, or to the welfare or survival of wildlife or wildlife resources of the United States.
- But it is important to note that the Federal Government cannot deal with these complicated problems alone. Partnerships among all interested parties—public and private—are crucial to successfully dealing with invasive species issues.
- It is great to have the flavors of the world available for our diets and our other senses, but we must still safeguard native environments. Just because something lives well and harmlessly in one place, does not mean it will do the same in another habitat.
- To help provide leadership and coordination on invasive species issues at the Federal level, Executive Order 13112 was signed in 1999 and created a National Invasive Species Council. NISC is co-chaired by the Secretaries of Agriculture, Interior and Commerce and includes the Secretaries of Transportation, State, Defense, Treasury, Homeland Security, Health and Human Services, the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Director of the U.S. Agency for International Development.
- This summer 2004, the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, The U.S. Peace Corps, and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration are also being invited to join.
- NISC is charged with coordinating with all federal agencies—approximately 50 different agencies—that have significant invasive species programs or activities. NISC also has an Invasive Species Advisory Committee to advise the federal government on the issue

of invasive species and to act as representatives of the many interested parties and stakeholders involved in this issue.

- Early detection, response, research and education are critical to successfully managing invasive species problems and preventing such problems in the first place. Pulling together public and private resources for events like this roundup is the key to protecting our environment and resources from attack by these invaders.
- Problems associated with invasive species are accelerating due to increases in trade, travel and tourism. In the United States, it is estimated by scientists that invasive species cost the U.S. economy \$137 billion per year. These things are coming faster than we can increase our knowledge base about them, so we must always share the best information we have and work together across jurisdictional lines and traditional scientific disciplines.
- Invasive species cause immense harm to the economy, the environment and in some cases, animal and human health. Examples of destructive invasive species include our now infamous northern snakehead fish, zebra mussel, brown tree snake, plants like yellow star thistle and tamarisk; insects such as emerald ash borer and Mediterranean fruit fly; mammals like the nutria – a rodent that is causing problems in the Chesapeake bay area of Maryland and other places; and pathogens and parasites such as West Nile virus and Exotic Newcastle disease.
- Invasive species are the second leading cause--after habitat loss--of species being listed as endangered or threatened, and infest more than 100 million acres across all 50 states. They do not respect borders and cause severe problems that are local, regional, national and global in scope.
- These snakehead fish have the potential to be very destructive and odds are high that they will be on the side of the bad guys or invasive species not the benign or helpful transplants we all depend on.
- They have the potential to cause enormous damage to our valuable recreational and commercial fisheries. We simply must do everything we can to prevent them from entering our waters, either accidentally or intentionally.
- And we must also realize that they are only one threat we face when considering invasive species. There are numerous other species equally or more dangerous to our environment. By coordinating efforts on invasive species, NISC can help
- For additional information on snakeheads and other invasive species issues, check out the NISC Website: www.invasivespecies.gov.