Press Release

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Buffalo District

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USACE Publishes Hydrilla Risk Assessment for the Great Lakes Basin

BUFFALO, NY– The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Buffalo District, in cooperation with the Engineer Research and Development Center, has published a risk assessment that summarizes the potential for hydrilla introduction within the Great Lakes.

The basin-wide risk assessment was completed under contract by Ecology and Environment, Inc. in partnership with North Carolina State University, Texas Tech University, and University of Toledo, with funding from the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, and identified five watersheds that could be at a higher risk for introduction of hydrilla: Southeastern Lake Ontario, St. Clair-Detroit, Western Lake Erie, Southern Lake Erie, and Southwestern Lake Erie.

Hydrilla is a highly invasive aquatic plant species that was first introduced to the southern United States in the 1960s from Asia. More recently there have been a noticeable number of infestations in the glacial lakes of the Northeast and Midwest, as well as within the Great Lakes Basin. Hydrilla infestations have potential to cause significant ecological and economic losses.

'The first step in managing any species is identifying the extent of its possible range. For potential invasive species, this means identifying suitable habitat where the species may successfully establish if introduced,' said Matt Barnes, Texas Tech University. Additionally, 'preventing the impacts of invasive species depends on understanding the pathways by which they are spread,' said Jon Bossenbroek, University of Toledo. Thus, species distribution and dispersal modeling were key components of the risk assessment to support the prediction of which Great Lakes watersheds are the most vulnerable to hydrilla introduction and establishment, and targeting priority areas for management and monitoring.

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The risk assessment report identifies potential economic and environmental impacts that may occur as a result of the introduction of hydrilla across the Great Lakes Basin, and provides recommendations and best management practices for the prevention and management of hydrilla infestations. Overall, potential hydrilla infestations were evaluated basin-wide in terms of what the impacts may be, where in the Great Lakes Basin environmental impacts from hydrilla may be more likely to occur, and how extensive those impacts may be by the year 2025. 'The findings of this risk assessment suggest that funding agencies and management practitioners should devote significant and increasing attention and resources to the threat posed by hydrilla to the Great Lakes Basin,' said Kris Erickson of Ecology and Environment, Inc.

Examples of best management practices include specific actions focused on prevention, early detection, and response such as management and monitoring. The first step to prevent the spread of hydrilla is public education directed toward water users, including passive recreation users, boaters, and fishermen. In addition, report recommendations include early detection efforts at nearshore, littoral zone habitats for the Great Lakes watersheds at highest predicted risk. 'It is important that practitioners continue to take a comprehensive approach to hydrilla management that includes prevention, early detection, monitoring, and where applicable, treatment to prevent the establishment of hydrilla within the Great Lakes', said Project Manager, Mike Greer.

For additional information about hydrilla, and to read the basin-wide risk assessment report, visit: http://hydrillacollaborative.com.

For additional information about the Corps of Engineers Aquatic Plant Control Research Program visit: https://apcrp.el.erdc.dren.mil/.

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