



Commission for Environmental Cooperation of North America

Roundtable on *“An Unwelcome Dimension of Trade: The Impact of Invasive Species in North America”*

**4 December 2003
Miami, Florida**

Summary Record

Hans Herrmann, head of the Conservation of Biodiversity Program, opened the session and welcomed the participants on behalf of the Executive Director. He explained that this dialogue between scientists and legislators had the purpose of assessing the magnitude of the invasive threat in North America, and most importantly to share best practices in terms of science, management, policy making and legislation. He noted the importance of gathering both scientists and policy makers to assist in crafting solutions to this serious and growing North American problem.

By way of background, he reviewed the CEC’s work to date on identifying and better understanding the trade-related pathways in North America. He concluded by noting that the challenge is to develop a common understanding of the magnitude of the problem and engage all actors of society in preventing and controlling the impacts of invasive species

Gustavo Alanís-Ortega, chair of the Joint Public Advisory Committee (JPAC) also made introductory remarks, explained the role of JPAC and its interest in invasive species. He explained that following this session, JPAC would develop an Advice to Council on the subject.

Mark Spalding, Environmental Law expert, facilitated the session. He explained the logistics noting that the intention was not to ‘restate the problem’ but rather to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the role of trade as it relates to the ecological, economic and health impacts of invasive species in North America and to share success stories/best practices in their prevention, control and eradication.

This summary will not repeat the presentations made by the invited speakers, but rather summarize the key findings and report on the discussions. These formal presentations are available as part of the final report on the session.

Part 1

Understanding the problem Discussion on the ecological, economic and health impacts of invasive alien species in North America

Presentations on impacts were made by Steven Murray, California State University on ecologic impacts, Marguerite Pappaioanou, Center for Disease Control on human health impacts and Jason Shogren, University of Wyoming on economic impacts.

Presentations on status were made by Stas Burgiel, Defenders of Wildlife on global trade, Ann Bartuska, the Nature Conservancy on species and Greg Ruiz, Smithsonian Environmental Research Center on pathways.

Roundtable open discussion

- It is important to focus on issues that can be addressed through policy, and use science to assist in providing the required information. Identifying the information needs of policy makers will be very helpful.
- It would be very difficult to close down pathways. For example, shutting down the shipping pathway. Instead, what we can do is work on risk assessment and risk management and include science, policy, regulation and public education.
- There is a need to standardize the terminology we use. Technical jargon is used indiscriminately creating confusion.
- Monitoring and prevention are keys. It is often too late once a species is established and the costs of eradication are enormous. For example the experience with the Asian gypsy moth in the North America has shown us that shifting resources from points of entry to the origin (infested areas) is less expensive and more successful. Also, putting resources towards managing the risk at origin (Russian Far East in this case) versus reliance on point of entry or destination inspection in North America is much more efficient.
- Creating a 'super fund' where some of the profits of increased trade are dedicated to prevent the spread of invasive species.
- Consider the specific context of a case when comparing experiences from other parts of the world. For example, what may work for an island-country such as New Zealand may not work for the North America region.
- It is extremely important to engage the general public in understanding the broad impacts of invasive species – economic and societal. Taking into consideration our long borders, the movement of invasive species, becomes increasingly difficult to track, prevent and manage if the public is not involved.
- Guidelines for voluntary management do exist. The US Coast Guard for example requires that their ship ballast be treated. Industry needs to become involved and committed and develop prevention programs that are industry-implemented.
- Further work needs to be done to assess national levels of acceptable risk. Explore this from a North American perspective. This would be a good role for the CEC. Look for examples of sectoral work, forestry for example, and build on these. Existing work on Pest Risk Assessment (PRA) is also very useful as a model North America has been a leader internationally in the development of the PRA process for plants.

- The impacts of invasive species as an issue should be considered in the negotiations of future trade agreements.
- The issue has to be tackled at different scales. One, at the intercontinental level and at the micro-regional transboundary scale.
- We need to ‘think outside the box’. Of course trade and potential environmental impacts is a key issue, but there are other interests at play – population growth, agriculture, protection of the commons. We need to look at the interaction of these issues in relation to invasive species. South Florida is a perfect example. There are important stakeholders who might be drawn into the invasive species discussion if they saw the connection.
- Perhaps the CEC could conduct a pilot project focused on the experience in South Florida over the past 100 years.
- Engaging the public remains a key challenge. The Zebra mussel for example, provided a great opportunity but the scientific community failed by not communicating the issue in an everyday language and there was no political leadership to move the issue forward.
- We need to communicate the benefits of preventing bio-invasions. There’s a lack of information on risk assessment and economic impact to support policy making.
- While the International Joint Commission (IJC) has taken up bio invasions as a priority issue, it is still lacking basic tools to get political leaders and the public engaged. We need to understand the risks and costs. We also need to be honest that control is expensive and there are no overall methodologies or technologies that can be easily applied. There is no ‘silver bullet’.
- This is not just an environmental issue. It requires coordination and communication amongst government agencies such as health, customs, agriculture and transport at the national, regional and local levels.
- If prevention is the ideal target (understanding that control and eradication are hugely expensive and very difficult), then the public has a very important role to play. Start with educating teachers who will educate students who will then educate their parents. Keep messages clear.

Keynote luncheon presentation by Clifford Lincoln, Member of Parliament, Canada

Mr. Lincoln made an eloquent plea for addressing the problem of invasive species before the economic and social impacts become overwhelming for governments and society. This is the era of massive globalization where people and goods are on the move. Trade interests are not being held accountable for the costs of these impacts pointing to a disconnection between cause and effect. The liabilities are not being borne by the perpetrator, but by the society. It is up to policy makers to address this disconnect on behalf of society. There are models to build on such as the European Union’s Green Ships initiative. We cannot continue with ‘business as usual’ if we truly believe in sustainable development and equity. He concluded with several parting thoughts:

- Harmonize our inventories, analysis and databases, so we know what we are talking about – educate civil society without fear of contradiction.
- Stronger national coordination is required to increase efficiency and effectiveness of cooperation at the international level.
- Make the linkages and integrate invasive species with climate change, toxins, transportation, health, etc. It is one big ball of wax. The driving force is health – especially children. That will wake people up.

- Education and awareness are vital. We cannot expect government and industry to drive this by themselves – it will be driven by public pressure. Begin in the schools.

Part 2

Share best practices

Presentations on effective approaches were made by Wendy F. Hall, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service on risk assessment, Ian McDonnell, North American Plant Protection Organization on prevention and early detection, Alfonso Aguirre, Island Conservation Mexico on control and eradication, Neil Maxwell, Office of the Auditor General of Canada on legislation and policy response and Jorge Soberón Mainero, CONABIO on research and prediction tools.

Roundtable open discussion

Key areas of cooperative action identified during the last part of the discussion:

- Assist in the development of community-based information and communications. This can have a very big impact.
- Facilitate work on risk assessment and the capacity for pathway analysis.
- Work on early detection and rapid response. There is great potential to engage communities and local groups, such as indigenous peoples. Work with other organizations (such as the IJC) to develop a volunteer cadre of citizen scientists to operate as an ‘on the ground early warning system’.
- Integrate and make accessible data management systems. The CEC could facilitate this work and even act as a clearinghouse for information.
- Encourage the training of taxonomists.
- Develop a compendium of best practices and share this information.
- Develop a network of ‘champions’ within government and civil society.
- Build on the work of existing organizations and infrastructure
- Participate in the development of regional and international standards
- Help make a business case for action by demonstrating that prevention is cost effective
- Encourage the development of regulations that create accountability and liability.

Hans Herrmann and Gustavo Alanís-Ortega thanked the participants for a very successful session. Mr. Herrmann also explained that a summary of the session would be prepared and made available on the CEC website at www.cec.org. He thanked JPAC, the CEC staff and interpreters and adjourned the session.