

Early Detection and Reporting of Invasive Species Workshop Summary Nov 29, 2004 – Dec 1, 2004

Intro

From November 29th through December 1st, a group of approximately seventy-five people assembled at The Nature Conservancy headquarters in Arlington, Virginia. This meeting was convened by the *Strange Days on Planet Earth* Impact team, led by Sea Studios Foundation with funding from Vulcan Productions. Future Search provided facilitation.

The Goal

The meeting aimed to create a powerful network of representatives from federal and state governments, non-governmental organizations, and informal educators to advance the use of **volunteers** for detecting and reporting harmful invasive species.

Results

Several tangible and exciting results came from this intensive three-day workshop. These included gathering general consensus on the overall system of detection using volunteers, the database structure and the elements of a volunteer citizen science Toolkit.

Create a system

Meeting attendees agreed that:

- (1) This project should be much more than the creation of a volunteer Toolkit. The project should build on the ten years of groundwork surrounding detection and reporting systems and learn from existing materials and programs.
- (2) The ultimate aim should be to nurture partnerships with appropriate federal and state organizations to create stable sources of funding and resources for this vital initiative.

Create an accessible database

During the meeting, attendees also agreed upon a database structure where all collected data could reside and be easily accessible to any interested parties. This database, to be maintained by United States Geological Survey (USGS), will provide a vital resource for helping the nation more effectively slow down the spread of harmful alien species and reduce their economic damages. The National Invasive Species Council will offer assistance to USGS in coordinating the use and access to the database, helping other groups and agencies fully utilize the information.

Create a Toolkit

Lastly, attendees outlined specific components for a **citizen science Toolkit** that staff from zoos, science centers, and aquaria and other qualified groups can employ. This kit will offer necessary and standard guidelines for recruiting and training volunteers to collect and report quality data on invasives in local communities.

The creation and use of this Toolkit is designed to coincide with the premiere of a new documentary series on PBS April 20th, 2005 entitled, *National Geographic's Strange Days on Planet Earth*. The opening episode of this award-winning series is dedicated to the topic of alien invasive species.

Toolkit Specifics

Meeting attendees outlined the toolkit's guiding themes, components, timeline, distribution and support system.

Guiding themes

- Toolkit users should be leaders –people able to effectively organize local volunteer efforts to detect invasive species in their community.
- Toolkit design should be flexible enough to work both in aquatic (freshwater and marine) and terrestrial systems and to detect multiple taxa including plants, animals and fungi.
- The Toolkit should be designed to enhance and enrich the use of existing citizen science programs, adding to ongoing small-scale efforts that are proving successful in detecting and cataloging species on public and private lands.

Components

Components of the Toolkit were identified and included:

- Introduction and mission statement
- Volunteer recruitment guidelines
- Volunteer handbook /Volunteer training module
- Fact sheets/Species lists
- Data collection guide including a web-based data capture form
- I.D. tools and a list of experts to check gathered data
- Marketing tools
- Educational materials
- Evaluation protocols

Several equipment needs were identified including GPS units, digital cameras and Internet access.

Timeline

Based on available resources and advice from participants, a timeline for development, field-testing and further distribution was created:

- Dec 8, 2005 – Feb 28, 2005 Development led by the Arizona Sonora Desert Museum (ASDM) with help from meeting participants
- February 2005 – March 2005 Recruit, introduce, and prepare other consortium partners
- April 15, 2005 – May 15, 2005 Field-testing at ASDM
- April 15, 2005 – June 30, 2005 ASDM Evaluation
- Mid-May 2005 Distribution to interested consortium partners
- Late May 2005 -June 30, 2005 Consortium partners roll out their tool kit programs

Distribution

Sea Studios Foundation will work with other *Strange Days* consortium members (zoos, aquaria, museums and science centers), the National Invasive Species Council and other vital groups to expand the use of the Toolkit throughout the nation. It is hoped that this effort will lead to long-term permanent funding for this vital and under-funded issue.

Support and more information

Support for the Citizen Science Toolkit is provided, in part, by the Strange Days Impact Initiative, which aims to enhance education efforts on invasive species early detection and reporting. *National Geographic's Strange Days on Planet Earth* is a Sea Studios Foundation production for Vulcan Productions, Inc. and National Geographic Television and Film. Additional funding was provided by National Science Foundation, The David and Lucile Packard Foundation. For more information on the entire Strange Days Project, please visit the PBS website www.pbs.org/strangedays