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NATIONAL OCEANIC & ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION • MINNESOTA SEA GRANT
U.S. FISH & WILDLIFE SERVICE • PET INDUSTRY JOINT ADVISORY COUNCIL

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**PET, WATER GARDEN INDUSTRIES, RESOURCE AGENCIES UNITE TO CREATE A NEW
'HABITATTITUDE™' ON AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES**

Federal agencies and the pet industry are teaming to helping consumers prevent the release and escape of non-native plants and animals through Habitattitude™, a new public education and outreach effort launched today the Super Zoo trade show in Las Vegas, Nev. The government-industry coalition is formed from the Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and Minnesota Sea Grant. NOAA is an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department.

Habitattitude™ encourages aquarium owners and water gardeners to avoid unwanted introductions of non-native species by adopting simple prevention steps when faced with an unwanted aquatic plant or fish:

- Contact a retailer for proper handling advice or for possible returns.
- Give/trade with another aquarist, pond owner or water gardener.
- Donate to a local aquarium society, school or aquatic business.
- Seal aquatic plants in plastic bags and dispose in the trash.
- Contact a veterinarian or pet retailer for guidance on humane disposal of animals.

"Beginning this fall, when aquarium hobbyists, backyard pond owners and water gardeners go to purchase fish or plants for their tanks or ponds, they'll receive the Habitattitude™ message," said Marshall Meyers, Executive Vice President and General Counsel of the Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council (PIJAC). "Through collaboration with NOAA's Sea Grant Program, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, state fish and wildlife agencies, the American Nursery and Landscape Association and other industry partners, we plan to get Habitattitude™ in front of millions of consumers."

Habitattitude™ materials will be displayed in aquarium stores, aquatic retail outlets, hobby magazines and nursery and landscape businesses across the country, as well as on packaging of related products.

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A new Web site, www.habitattitude.net, will help consumers to learn more about responsible behaviors and how to prevent the spread of potential aquatic nuisance species. The site includes information on the federal and state laws and statutes that regulate the aquatic organisms, recommended alternatives to releasing plants and animals, instructions on how individuals and clubs can get involved and detailed information on some of the more problematic aquarium and water garden species that have created problems with our native aquatic systems.

"The United States Commission on Ocean Policy Report details how we should coordinate public education and outreach efforts on aquatic invasive species with the aim of increasing public awareness about the importance of prevention. This program falls right in line with that recommendation," said retired Navy Vice Admiral Conrad C. Lautenbacher, Ph.D., undersecretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere and NOAA administrator. "Non-native plants and animals can cause irreparable harm to the environment and can damage recreational and commercial uses of our aquatic resources."

"Habitattitude™ builds on the successful government, business and citizen partnership that is helping stem the spread of the zebra mussel across the United States," said U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Steve Williams. "While most invasive species come into the country as hitchhikers through commercial trade, some aquarium owners and water gardeners have unknowingly complicated the challenge invasive species pose for conserving America's wildlife and landscapes. Habitattitude™ will give them the knowledge they need to help them prevent invasive species introductions and conserve the natural world they appreciate so much."

"This partnership focuses on raising public awareness, engaging people, and promoting simple and consistent actions that help conserve our natural resources," said Mamie Parker, co-chair of the ANS Task Force and Assistant Director for Fisheries and Habitat Conservation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. "It's not about the fish and plants but about promoting responsible behaviors."

PIJAC and its members, who represent 70 percent of the U.S. pet industry and 90 percent of the aquarium industry, have committed over \$1.1 million to the campaign. Their contribution leveraged a \$300,000 grant from NOAA's National Sea Grant College Program to Minnesota Sea Grant and a \$100,000 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service effort.

NOAA is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources and the habitat on which they depend, through scientific research, management and enforcement. NOAA's stewardship of these resources benefits the nation by supporting coastal communities, while helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public. To learn more about NOAA, please visit <http://www.noaa.gov>.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. To learn more about the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, please visit <http://www.fws.gov>.