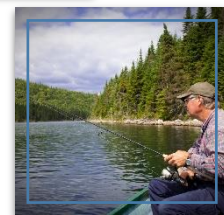
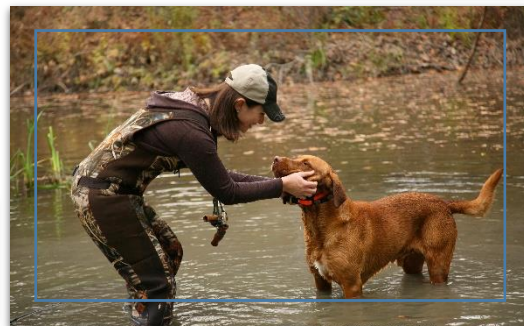


Paving the Path to Prevention: Working with Outdoor Enthusiasts to Stop the Spread of Invasive Species

Final Report



Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters
04/30/2020

Project Background

Invasive species are a growing environmental and economic threat to Ontario. Invasive species are plants, animals, and micro-organisms introduced by human action outside their natural past or present distribution whose introduction or spread threatens the environment, the economy, or society, including human health (Government of Canada, 2004). Once established, they are extremely difficult and costly to control and eradicate, and their ecological effects are often irreversible. Preventing harmful introductions before they occur is the most effective means to avoid or minimize risk.

In 2018, ISAP staff worked with a communications consultant to develop a communications strategy for the program which included the distribution of a survey to four key audiences (anglers, hunters, boaters, trail users) to collect information on why people do (or don't) take actions to prevent the introduction and/or spread of invasive species. The survey also asked each target audience about their communication preferences in order to enable the ISAP to select the best communication methods and messages to reach target audiences and motivate them to take action. A total of 3,885 people responded to the survey, and responses identified a common barrier to taking action – they have never seen any invasive species; therefore, they don't believe they are in the natural areas where they recreate. The survey responses also indicated that preferred methods of communications are Ontario OUT of DOORS magazine, email, websites, signage, and social media (Facebook). Knowing this information allows strategies and messaging to be developed to specifically address the barrier through a preferred method of communication.

The goal of this project was to build campaigns that address the common barrier to anglers, hunters, boaters, and trail users taking action to prevent the introduction/spread of invasive species as identified by the target audience survey distributed in 2018. Campaigns developed for each audience focused on the concept that - just because you can't see them, doesn't mean they are not there – and provided each group with the knowledge they need to fulfill our calls to action.

Project Achievements

This project progressed as planned, with one deviation from the project goals and plan due to COVID-19, as is highlighted below. Program staff addressed identified barriers to taking action to mitigate the introduction and spread of invasive species via the following communications platforms and deliverables in 2019-2020:

1. Ontario OUT of DOORS magazine

- Spreadsheet with ideas for potential production in OOD
- At least one article published in OOD (OFAH Insider)

Achievements:

Staff produced content targeted to anglers, boaters, and hunters for publication in Ontario OUT of DOORS magazine (e.g., waterfowl hunting article).



2. Email/Newsletter Outreach

- At least four e-newsletters distributed to subscribers with information to the barrier identified in the target audience survey
- One digital campaign focused on promoting the e-newsletter
- “print-ready” content for each target audience developed and shared with OFAH communications team for use in OFAH e-blasts and social media

Achievements:

Program staff produced and distributed 12 monthly e-newsletters. The program has 579 people who have subscribed with an average open rate of 41%. Program staff utilized social media to promote subscriptions, as well as a sign-up sheet when attending events. Through the social media posts, staff achieved 1,417 impressions and 28 engagements.

The ISAP worked with OFAH communications staff to leverage the reach of its social media messaging. When the OFAH shared ISAP social media posts, there was a significant increase in the number of impressions/engagements achieved.

For example, the ISAP's post on how to photograph invasive fish achieved 15,370 impressions, with 5,832 (37%) coming from an OFAH share.

3. ISAP website

- Updated website content reflecting the identified barrier to taking actions, as communicated by anglers, hunters, boaters, and trail users
- Updated information specific to each activity, including communicating how each group can be part of the solution, and the steps they can take to mitigate introduction/spread

Achievements:

The ISAP website continues to be an excellent source of information about invasive species. Program staff reviewed the resources available for download on the ISAP website to ensure all resources were uploaded and available in digital form for use by the target audiences. Between April 1, 2019 and March 31, 2020, the ISAP website had 801,537 total page views, and 398,064 total users.

Staff utilized social media to promote the website, and coordinated 32 posts (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram). These social media posts resulted in 126,057 impressions, and 7,099 engagements.

4. Social Media

- Four new social media campaigns (one per target audience) graphically designed for use by the ISAP/OFAH
- Investigate/build a budget to boost these campaigns once posted to ISAP's social media platforms
- develop a communications plan, including a budget, to maximize the ISAP's reach to each of the target audiences
- content shared with OFAH communications for use on OFAH social media platforms

Achievements:

Staff have developed 17 CleanDrainDry posts targeted to **boaters, anglers and waterfowl hunters** for social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) resulting in 79,555 impressions, and 5,400 engagements.

Staff also coordinated social media campaign for PlayCleanGo Awareness week. This campaign was targeted to **trail users/recreationalists**. In total, staff

developed five posts for Facebook, Twitter, and Ingram resulting in 27,711 impressions and 936 engagements.

Overall, between April and March, the program gained many new followers on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Through these social media platforms, the ISAP achieved over 2.9 million digital impressions with our posts and got the conversation going with over 117 thousand engagements. The ISAP YouTube channel had 11.9 thousand views, resulting in 353 total hours watched.

5. Event Attendance

- Attend the Toronto Sportsman's Show to connect with target audiences
- Attend ~4 events (one per target audience) to engage groups in prevention initiatives and inform them of the resources available to support taking action

Achievements:

With funding support from the Great Lakes Fishery Commission, the program participated in the Great Lakes Regional Aquatic Invasive Species Landing Blitz from July 1-7, 2019. Working together, state and provincial agencies in the Great Lakes region coordinated events and delivered messaging to increase awareness about aquatic invasive species and how **anglers/boaters** can help prevent their spread. As a result, events were held at over 440 location in the US and Canada. The ISAP engaged boaters at launches in Mississauga, Trenton, Whitby, and Sibbald Point Provincial Park, as well as coordinated digital outreach campaigns to inform boaters of our efforts, and to reiterate the Clean, Drain, Dry message. In total, the ISAP reached more than 48,000 people.

Program staff attended numerous events with support from the Ontario Wildlife Foundation. **Events were selected based on the ISAP's ability to connect with anglers, hunters, boaters, and/or trail users**, and included the following:

- Asian Carps Information Session
- Owen Sound Salmon Spectacular
- Water Soldier Information Sessions (2)
- Humber by Canoe
- National Hunting Trapping and Fishing Heritage Day (event at HFHC)
- GreenUp Bioblitz
- RBG's Urban Ravine Symposium
- Lake Links Workshop
- ICAIS 2019
- Canadian Ice Fishing Expo
- Booth at Patagonia (retail store)

Unfortunately, staff were scheduled to attend numerous events between January and March, including the Toronto Sportsman's Show; however, the events were cancelled due to COVID-19.

6. Measuring Success

- Infographic summarizing achievements (e.g., people reached, events attended, total impressions)
- Distribution/promotion of online survey to target audiences (anglers, hunters, boaters, trail users)

Achievements:

Program staff distributed and promoted an online survey for anglers, hunters, boaters, and trail users. Staff developed and distributed 9 social media posts promoting a link to the survey and achieved 58,648 impressions and 1,436 engagements. A total of 419 people have responded to the survey. The results from this survey will continue to be collected, and will be used to inform the ISAP's future education and outreach efforts.

Conclusion

The achievements of this project have been summarized in an infographic included with this report, and would not have been possible without the funding provided by the Ontario Wildlife Foundation. A coordinated, targeted approach to engaging key audiences is critical to successfully preventing the introduction and/or spread of invasive species. Through this project, ISAP staff were able to reach hundreds of thousands of people engaged in the activities through which invasive species are introduced and/or spread. By continuing to educate target audiences on invasive species, the ISAP looks to empower communities to help protect our environment, economy, and society.