The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the accomplishments of the SuAsCo CISMA for 2023. These accomplishments reflect the Annual Priority Actions taken by the CISMA’s subcommittees, which are guided by the priorities outlined in the SuAsCo CISMA Invasive Species Management Plan.

**General Highlights of 2023**

Steering Committee Officers – Terms expire January 2024

* Rebecca Bucciaglia, Chair
* Vice Chair – Gerry DiBello
* Secretary – Emma Lord
* Treasurer – Gerry DiBello

The Town of Acton was elected to the Steering Committee for a three- year term ending in 2026.

Acton filled the open Steering Committee seat that was vacated by the Town of Framingham in 2022.

**Weed Warrior Program**

Sudbury Valley Trustees’ Weed Warrior program is part of CISMA. Information on the Weed Warrior Program appears on the CISMA website. CISMA Coordinator Kristin O’Brien led several Weed Warrior trainings for various towns this past year. The coordinator worked with SVT’s AmeriCorps member to start programs with the Town of Littleton, OARS, and the Concord Land Conservation Trust. The goal was to train the trainers so they could start their own training sessions and begin sponsoring invasives control events in the Spring of 2023.

**Spring Meeting**

The Spring meeting was held on March 14, 2023 via Zoom. The meeting had twenty-six attendees. Small Grant awardees for 2023 were announced. A total of $6000 was awarded. The meeting was recorded and posted on the CISMA website. In opening comments, Kristin announced that there was an open seat on the CISMA Steering Committee and asked applicants to contact her.

* Subcommittee Updates:
* Weed Warriors – Trained and certified volunteers from ten organizations on invasive species identification. Organizations can post their events on the SuAsCo CISMA website.
* As of March 14, subcommittees have yet to meet but plan meetings later in the spring.
* APA’s for the subcommittees have been posted on the CISMA website.
* Presentation One: Erik Sechler from the Native Plant Trust – MIPAG New Invasive Criteria and Review
  + Erik is a member of Mass Invasive Plant Advisory Group (MIPAG) and CISMA’s representative to MIPAG.
  + In his presentation he outlined the fifteen criteria used for listing new plant species as invasive. If a species is deemed as an invasive, the group makes a recommendation to the State that it be listed as such. Some of the criteria used include: being able to outcompete other species if it’s not managed; is it widespread or common in MA; and does it grow rapidly and produce high amounts of seed?
  + A question-and-answer session followed.
* Presentation Two: Dan Buonaito, PhD, Department of Environmental Conservation at UMass, Amherst - Invasive Species and Climate Change
  + Dan is affiliated with the Regional Invasive Species and Climate Change (RISCC) networking group @risccnetwork.org.
  + The aim of RISCC is to reduce the compounding effects in invasive species and climate change.
  + He noted that there are many ways climate change has affected invasive species spread. Invasives emerge earlier than native plants and stay longer than they did in the past.
  + RISCC gathers invasive data from many sources and shares the data. One example of RISCC’s sharing is “Pop-Up Lunch Dates” as well as symposia and workshops.
  + RISCC also does original research and publishes the data.
  + A question-and-answer session followed.
* The “Vine” portion of the meeting featured a discussion regarding topics like limiting use of pesticides and bio-controls (beetles) for invasives management. Success stories of invasive plant management were shared.

**Fall Meeting**

Twenty participants including eight Steering Committee members attended the in-person meeting in Concord on November 14, 2023.

* Weed Warrior program – (Jane Maloney) - Several new invasive species have been added to the list on the CISMA website based on a recommendation from the ED&C Subcommittee. The Weed Warrior Subcommittee is planning for spring volunteer recruitment initiatives.
* Early Detection and Control (Bud Sechler) – The Early Detection and Control Subcommittee met in June and had a very productive meeting. Jordan McCarron from the Weston Conservation Department joined the subcommittee as a new member. The subcommittee held an “Office Hours” meeting on November 9 for potential small grant applicants to ask questions and receive feedback. Eight people attended the meeting. Erik also updated the group on new invasive species that MIPAG has approved: Japanese Black Pine, Scotch Broom, Wall Lettuce, and Black or European Alder. The members present agreed that these species should also be added to the CISMA website.
* Legislation and Policy Subcommittee (Delia Kaye) – The group has had conversations with MA DEP and is advocating for a blanket permit for homeowners to manage invasives on their land. There has not been much movement on this front. The group will convene again before the end of 2023 to determine next steps.
* Small Grant Presentations – The committee heard reports from their respective presenters regarding three projects that received 2023 Small Grant funds.
* Concord Land Conservation Trust – After rescheduling twice due to weather, CLCT held a successful volunteer Buckthorn hand pull and cut and dab event at Wright Woods in partnership with *Parterre Ecological*. Seven volunteers participated, and much more ground was able to be covered than anticipated. Sam of CLCT addressed whether unlicensed volunteers were allowed to apply herbicides (dab) in the presence of a licensed applicator. Sam finds this to be a useful method, but she will confirm whether it is allowed. It may depend on each individual contractor/applicator.

* Harvard Conservation Commission – Weather delays pushed back this project to the fall. Roadside Knotweed was treated with Foliar Spray in October. The Town of Harvard will monitor the treated sites to see how well the treatment worked.
* Littleton Conservation Trust – The LCT successfully completed their project to use mechanical equipment to remove vegetation for access and treatment of Mile-a-Minute.
* Littleton Conservation Commission – The Littleton Conservation Commission used their grant fund for planning. This included Phragmites management planning, invasives mapping, public education initiatives, and updating an existing management plan. The commission worked with *Land Stewardship Inc.* to conduct the mapping portion of the project.
* Town of Acton - Acton used their grant funds to purchase native plants to replace the Multiflora Rose that was removed from a town owned site.
* **Concord Presentation on Punkatasset Preserve**

Will Holden from Concord Natural Resources discussed the invasives removal work that the town and volunteers undertook at Punkatasset Preserve. The focus area was a few large mature trees that were being overrun with Bittersweet, Multiflora Rose, and other invasives. Focusing on specific key locations like large mature trees is a good way to tackle large, overwhelming invasives removal projects. Before and after photos showed a huge difference.

* In the “Vine” portion of the meeting, group members discussed their experiences with invasives control. A number of questions were asked and answered by members of the group.

**Small Grant Program 2023**

The following projects were completed and organizations reimbursed:

* Littleton Conservation Trust- $877.50 spent of $1440 originally requested.
  + Note: The CISMA Coordinator asked the Steering Committee to vote on re-allocating the remaining $562.50 that was not used by the Littleton Conservation Trust. The funds would be used to pay an additional annual CISMA website maintenance fee to fund Weed Warrior upgrades that totaled $920. The Steering Committee voted on July 28 to approve requesting the RSC to allow CISMA to re-allocate the unused funds.
* Town of Acton - Fully reimbursed $285 for the purchase of native plants.
* Harvard Conservation Commission - $1,650 for Knotweed management.
* Littleton Conservation Commission - $1,500 for invasives plan.
* Concord Land Conservation Trust- $1,125 for herbicide application at Wright Woods Conservation Area.

**Annual Priority Actions 2023**

As defined in the SuAsCo CISMA MOU, Annual Priority Actions (APAs) are the prioritized list of action items for the upcoming year. APAs for each subcommittee are provided below, with status appearing in bold.

* Aquatic Invasives Management (AIM)
* **Objective 1:** Establish a watershed-wide Water Chestnut task force. The AIM Subcommittee serves in this role. Recruit interested members from other watershed towns--**Ongoing**.
* **Objective 2:** Establish watershed-wide monitoring and reporting. Field-test OARS’ new Water Chestnut (*Trapa natans*) reporting app. Recruited volunteers in each town to do basic assessment (presence/absence) of Water Chestnut in surface waters July through August. Asked conservation agents to report areas being worked on and to suggest active volunteers to be trained. – **Achieved**.
* **Objective 3:** Outreach and local participation. Facilitate communication with towns and stakeholder groups. Organize meetings that focus on securing support for town-based monitoring, encourage direct assistance with transport and disposal of harvested plant materials, and discuss consistent permitting of control efforts. Promote volunteer training, pulls and reporting through the Weed Warrior program. – **Ongoing.**
* **Objective 4:** Consistent wetlands permitting of control efforts. Continue working with the LAPS Subcommittee and DCR to push for efficient and effective watershed-wide permitting and allowing volunteer management. – **Ongoing**.
* **Objective 5:** Prevent and control new infestations. Encourage information sharing within and between municipalities to identify new infestations. Educate the public on identification and removal techniques through Weed Warriors and OARS’ App. Share observations on changes in Purple Loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*) populations. Share information about emerging aquatic invasives, including Water Clover, *Marsilea quadrifolia*. – **Ongoing**.
* **Objective 6:** Contribute to research on effective controls. Keep track of effectiveness and impacts of herbicide-based aquatic invasives control efforts. Share information on new/different weed control technologies and contractors. – **Ongoing**.
* **Objective 7:** Support Water Chestnut control efforts. Encourage municipalities to provide annual support to water chestnut management and education efforts. In 2023 OARS will work through CISMA’s Weed Warriors program to train volunteers to do watershed-wide water chestnut management. Continued advocacy for Invasive Species Management legislation in the state legislature. The AMIS bi-annual meetings will continue to facilitate sharing of experience, information and advice among municipalities and non-profits working on aquatic invasives management. -- **Ongoing**.
* Early Detection and Control (EDC)
  + Recruit new subcommittee members. -- **Ongoing**.
  + Support small grant applicants by hosting a meeting to discuss project and provided management recommendations/identification/etc. – **Achieved**.
  + During spring/summer/early fall, conducted two tours of invasive plant projects that have had success and/or experimenting with new invasive plant control techniques. – **Achieved**.
  + Conducted early detection invasive plant training to Weed Warrior trainees. – **Achieved**.
  + Conducted potential invasive plant assessment of a property of interest (private property in South Framingham). – **Achieved**.
* Education and Outreach (EO)
  + The Education and Outreach Subcommittee did not meet in 2023.
* Legislative and Permitting Subcommittee (LAP)
* Continue to develop a streamlined wetland permitting process to allow homeowners and land conservation organizations to conduct small‑scale terrestrial invasive species control projects. – **Ongoing**.
* Continue to follow and support state Invasive Species Coordinator legislation drafted by Senator Pat Jehlen. – **Ongoing**.
* Coordinate with CISMA’s Weed Warriors program on permitting requirements. – **Ongoing**.
* Weed Warrior (WW)
* Educational Resources
  + Create and/or compile educational resources for volunteers and trainers including videos, guides, and brochures. -- **Ongoing**
  + Organize advertising for time sensitive invasive pulls across the region e.g. water chestnut and garlic mustard. -- **Ongoing**
* Use new events calendar to post invasive events -- **Achieved**
* Schedule monthly training- SVT held two trainings throughout the growing season -- **Achieved**
* Develop invasives mapping protocol -- **Ongoing**
* Disposal Guidelines- Homeowners and Organizations/Towns Kristin and Jane G -- **Ongoing**
* Create one Sheet Invasives Flyers for several priority species and share with CISMA partners. -- **Ongoing**
* Steering Committee Administrative Duties
  + Generated annual report for 2023 -- **Achieved**.
  + Refine metrics of evaluating the accomplishments of the CISMA -- **Ongoing**.
    - Administered membership survey to gauge the helpfulness of CISMA and services provided. Overall respondents reported that the CISMA website is helpful and informative, but they were unaware of certain resources like Raising the Bar on Volunteerism.
    - Coordinator began tracking the number of attendees at various CISMA meetings and events as suggested by River Stewardship Council.
  + Scheduled and coordinated the Annual Meeting that’s open to all members -- **Achieved**.
  + Administer the small grant program -- **Achieved**.
  + Pursue additional funding through grants -- **Achieved**.
    - Coordinator applied for River Stewardship Council grant Achieved
  + Coordinate the CISMA election. -- **Achieved**.