

SUASCO CISMA

Strategic Plan

A Five-year Strategic Plan for the SUASCO
Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area
2024-2029

Introduction

The Sudbury, Assabet, and Concord Rivers (SuAsCo) watershed Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (CISMA) is a group of federal, state, and local landowners and land managers committed to controlling invasive species within the watershed (see Appendix A). The CISMA group engages participants in a collaborative effort to share knowledge, expertise, and resources as well as to coordinate invasive species management activities within the watershed.

Invasive species pose one of the greatest threats to biodiversity, natural landscapes, agricultural interests, recreational activities, quality of life, and scenic beauty of the watershed. There are many ways to deal with this threat including initial prevention, early detection, and control through manual removal, mechanical treatment, pesticide application, biological control, grazing, and fire. Invasive species do not stop at ownership boundaries, and without a coordinated effort among a broad range of private and public land owners and land managers, these species will continue to invade our watershed, altering the habitat and reducing the recreational and aesthetic value of the watershed.

The intention of this plan is to guide CISMA Committees and Partners on priorities that should advance our goal to coordinate invasive species management activities.

Background

The SuAsCo watershed is made up of 36 towns in the metro-west area of Massachusetts (see Appendix A). The watershed covers approximately 377 square miles and includes a variety of upland and wetland habitats, historic sites, scenic sites, and recreational areas. A portion of the Sudbury, Assabet, and Concord Rivers has been designated as “Wild and Scenic” under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act for its literary, recreational, scenic, historical, and ecological values.

Purpose of the CISMA

The purpose of the CISMA is to protect the biological, aesthetic, cultural, historical, and recreational values of natural areas, farmland, water resources, and scenic vistas by cooperating, coordinating activities, and sharing resources necessary for the prevention and control of invasive species on public and private lands across ownership boundaries within the CISMA.

Goals and Objectives

Goal 1: Maintain Communication and Knowledge Sharing Amongst CISMA Members

The strength of the SuAsCo CISMA depends on having a knowledgeable membership that is able to effectively communicate their findings to land managers and private landowners within the watershed. To improve upon this strength, the SuAsCo CISMA should help facilitate the exchange of information by acting as a clearing house for this information and serve as a resource that members can reference and refer others to. It is the responsibility of the coordinator and interested CISMA members to facilitate and guide the collection and exchange of this information.

Objective 1: Maintain a functional website that helps facilitate the exchange of information between CISMA members and the public. Information such as, but not limited to best management practices, training, projects (past and current), mapping initiatives, shared available resources, etc.

Objective 2: Provide more informal knowledge sharing opportunities such as roundtable discussions or CISMA members and other interested parties to exchange information and identify new collaborations or opportunities within the watershed. Additionally, the CISMA Coordinator serves as a resource to members with questions.

Objective 3: Actively provide an avenue for dissemination and communication of information and resources through the use of the monthly newsletter, special bulletins and at CISMA meetings. Content includes meetings, training, conferences, workshops, grant opportunities, mapping initiatives, shared available resources, etc.

Objective 4: As members are encouraged to participate in the sharing of information and new collaborations are identified, the coordinator and interested CISMA members will help actively apply knowledge and learning to new projects and initiatives. For example, invasive mapping programs (such as EDDMaps) or developing an invasive species management plan for a new land acquisition.

Goal 2: Encourage a Culture of Volunteerism

One of the most valuable resources to the members of the SuAsCo CISMA are knowledgeable, experienced, and engaged volunteers. The SuAsCo CISMA strives to cultivate this population of volunteers by offering training, direction, and resources to volunteers and CISMA members.

Objective 1: To keep volunteers engaged, CISMA members should provide opportunities that allow volunteers to participate in as many aspects of invasive species management as possible, ranging from planning to pulling, to restoration and monitoring. Including volunteers in the full spectrum of management will help to maintain their engagement. This can be done through the SuAsCo CISMA Weed Warrior Program.

Objective 2: Volunteers have varying levels of capabilities, so knowing how to leverage their abilities on a project is necessary. To help direct volunteers to opportunities best suited to their wants and abilities, the SuAsCo CISMA will

provide a list of volunteer opportunities offered by CISMA Weed Warrior members.

Objective 3: Regular training opportunities should be offered to interested individuals or groups. During these training sessions, CISMA members should showcase upcoming projects in order to recruit volunteers as well as match potential volunteers to projects and gauge their skill level.

Goal 3: Maintain a Functional and Flexible Organizational and Financial Structure to the SuAsCo CISMA

The organizational core of the SuAsCo CISMA will continue to consist of a Steering Committee that will guide the operations of the CISMA and continue to seek opportunities that provide value and support the work of CISMA members. The SuAsCo CISMA will continue to maintain a long-term funding strategy to support a paid part-time coordinator, a functional website, and basic administrative needs.

Objective 1: Create working groups and subcommittees that reflect the needs of the CISMA membership.

Objective 2: Continue seeking and offering small grant opportunities that support the work of the CISMA membership. Share grant opportunities to CISMA membership through the monthly newsletter.

Objective 3: Support the use of the standard project template by members and require grant recipients to use this template as well as report on their project results so that the projects can be updated on the website.

Objective 4: Explore alternative and long-term funding options for the coordinator and continue seeking grant opportunities.

Goal 4: Early Detection and Prioritization

One of the most important strategies for invasive plant management is to prevent the spread of new invasive species in the watershed. Second to early detection is prioritization of control efforts. Given the pervasiveness of invasive plants in our watershed, it is imperative that CISMA members prioritize their efforts to focus on the most ecologically significant areas within the watershed and within each town.

Objective 1: Maintain CISMA Early Detection and Control Subcommittee. Communicate with NPT and MIPAG to update the list of early detection species and distribute identification, habitat, and location information to CISMA members.

Objective 2: Work with CISMA members to establish ecological priority areas for management at the town or property level.

Objective 3: Provide planning, prioritizing, and management guidance, using best management practices.

Objective 4: Promote the integration of restoration practices and invasive species management, including removal of invasives and preventing the spread of invasives to promote healthy native habitat.

Goal 5: Stay Current with the Science

The SuAsCo CISMA will stay current on best management practices for invasive plants managed within the state of Massachusetts as well as how climate change will impact current and future projects of the SuAsCo CISMA.

Objective 1: Attend conferences and meetings relevant to the goals and objectives of the SuAsCo CISMA and its members. At least one member of the SuAsCo CISMA should attend relevant conferences and report their findings to the rest of the SuAsCo CISMA membership.

- MIPAG: Massachusetts Invasive Plant Advisory Group
- MDAR: Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources
- Northeast Regional Invasive Species Climate Change Management Conference

Objective 2: The CISMA coordinator and partners will communicate with colleges, universities, state and federal agencies, regional organizations and other institutions to stay up to date on current research, tools, mapping, treatment methods, etc. Members of the SuAsCo CISMA will then be notified of any updates through member meetings and the newsletter.

Appendix A

