



**Habitattitude**™

PROTECT OUR ENVIRONMENT

DO NOT RELEASE FISH AND AQUATIC PLANTS

# **A National Campaign to Prevent Releases of Fish and Aquatic Plants**

Marshall Meyers  
Washington, D.C.

Presented on behalf of  
US Fish and Wildlife Service  
NOAA Sea Grant Partnership  
Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council



# Aquarists Abound!

- Pets are an important part of our culture.
- Independent retail sales ~\$1.4B.
- Over 13M household aquaria with thousands more in offices, etc...
- Various specialties contribute to a strong industry.





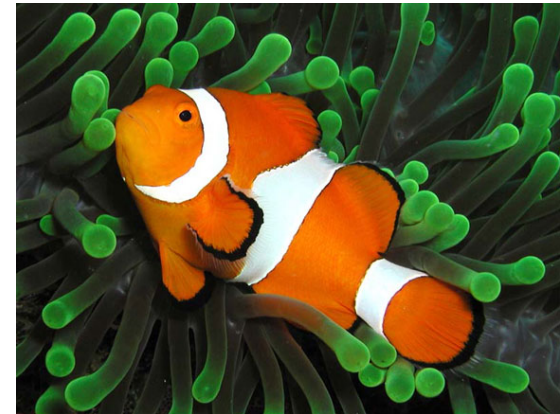
# **Water Gardens are Blooming!**

- **Water garden popularity rising rapidly.**
- **Fastest growing segment**
- **"Parade of Ponds" - community outings similar to parade of homes are growing substantially in many metro areas.**



# Benefits Create Challenges

- Keeping live species requires financial investment, specialized knowledge, effort, time for care, and responsibility.
- Owners create a connection with the environment.
- Situations occur where...
  - Owners are faced with disposing of unwanted aquatic plants or fish.
  - They inadequately contain fish and aquatic plants and escape occurs.







## Other Challenges...

- Increasing frequency of aquatic plants, fish and other animals associated with pet industry being found in the environment.
- Potential to cause negative environmental, economic and human health impacts.
- Translates into increased scrutiny and negative public perceptions about hobbies.
- And potential for increased regulation.



# Even More Challenges...

- Disconnected players in private and public sectors.
- Long-standing adversarial relationships.
- No unifying agenda.
- Confusing, competing and incorrect messages conveyed to consumers.





# So What?!

- Complex problems require solutions.
- Situational analysis:
  - Think systems change!
  - We all need to think differently about aquatic invasive species and their relationship to the issue.
  - With higher priorities and scarce resources, unifying agendas need to be set and collaboration needs to become standard.





# Meeting the Challenges...

- **Habitattitude™** is a proactive solution! A unique partnership --- industry, academia and government joining forces to address these challenges.
- Focus –
  - Raise public awareness,
  - Engage people,
  - Promote unified environmental messages with corresponding beneficial actions
- All segments of industry are part of the solution.





# What is Habitattitude™?

- Nationally branded campaign targeting aquarists and water gardeners.
- Links environmental messages with beneficial actions.
- Designed to reach targeted audiences.

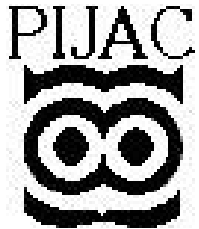


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# Habitattitude™ Advisory Panel

Under the leadership of the national  
ANS Task Force...



Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council (PIJAC)



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

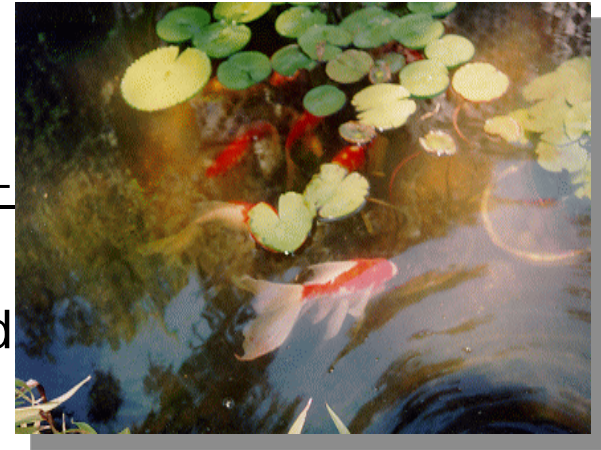


NOAA Great Lakes Sea Grant Network partners



# Habitattitude™ Partners

- PIJAC
  - Represents 90% of U.S. aquarium industry.
  - Council and its members committed > \$1.1+
- U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
  - Lead federal agency addressing fish and wild
  - Contributed > \$100,000.
- NOAA/National Sea Grant College Program
  - Research, outreach and communication expertise in 31 states.
  - Awarded a \$300,000 2-year grant.
- State and local pet owner organizations
  - Beginning to spread the word.
- This is only the beginning...





# Habitattitude<sup>TM</sup>

- **Educational outreach**
- **Programs that**
  - Clearly articulate issue
  - Explain risks and how to minimize
  - Provide user friendly identification aids
  - Provide guidance on what to do





# Habitattitude™

## Public Awareness

Circular 886

### Don't Release Exotic Fish



U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Department of the Interior

Florida Cooperative Extension Service  
Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences  
University of Florida  
John T. Woeste, dean

### Don't Release Non-native Species!



#### Water Gardeners

Pondscapes, water gardens, and ornamental garden pools are becoming increasingly popular in the United States. Water gardens have a centuries' old history in the Orient and a soothing quality that is enhanced by the ever-changing beauty they provide. While the constantly shifting scene of fish, plants, reptiles, amphibians, and reflections on the water make water gardening a rewarding and fulfilling hobby, certain precautions should be taken in order to maintain the surrounding native environment.

Did you know that your water garden may be harboring a plant or animal that if misused could cause harm? Most plants and animals used in water gardens are non-native species such as milfoil or koi. A non-native species is any plant or animal that is found outside its natural range. Some gardeners release these non-natives because they can no longer maintain the water garden; they may have lost interest in the garden; or the plant or animal has outgrown the garden. Whatever the reason, releasing any plant or animal into local waters such as rivers, lakes, ponds, and even drainage ditches is not a good idea.

**It Isn't Good For Your Plant/Animal** - Although you may think you are doing the plant or animal a favor by releasing it, you are more likely condemning it to death. Non-native species often die soon after release because they are not able to function in their new environment. They commonly die due to predation, starvation, temperature extremes, parasites or diseases.

### Don't Release Non-native Species!



#### Aquarium Hobbyists

Non-native plants and animals are those found outside the boundaries of their natural range. Most aquarium plants and animals available for sale in pet shops are non-natives that are imported predominantly from Central and South America, Africa and southeast Asia.

Unfortunately, a number of non-native aquarium pets and plants are released into the wild each year by hobbyists who discard them for a variety of reasons. As a result, in the Gulf Coast states, nine non-native plants and 88 non-native fishes have been found in local lakes, reservoirs, rivers and streams. Of these, all nine of the plant and over 20 of the fish species are now established in these waters. Although you may think you are doing them a favor, releasing aquarium plants or animals into local waters is not a good idea.

**It Isn't Good For Your Pet** - Non-native species often die soon after release because they are not able to function in their new environment. They commonly die due to predation, starvation, temperature extremes or parasites and diseases.

**It Isn't Good For Us or the Environment** - Once established, non-native species are difficult, if not impossible, to control or eradicate. These species compete with native species for habitat and food, transmit parasites or diseases, and have been known to hybridize with native species.

## PROTECT Our Natural Resources



Foreign animals will compete with our native fish and wildlife for food and space. Some may present a threat to human safety, while others may become agricultural pests or public nuisances.  
STATE LAW PROHIBITS THE RELEASE OF ANY NON-NATIVE WILDLIFE!



FLORIDA  
GAME & FRESH WATER FISH COMMISSION





# How is Habitattitude™ Different?

- Moves 'beyond brochures.'
- Seeks to raise awareness, engage people, and change behaviors!
- Unifies government, industry, academia and consumers to expand ownership and promote solutions.
- Uses built-in evaluation to assess measurable impacts (e.g., behavioral change).



# Habitattitude™ – What You Get!

## ■ Access to:

- Brand and campaign materials.
- Web site ([www.habitattitude.net](http://www.habitattitude.net)) as a central resource.
- Other campaign resources available to interested partners.

## ■ Support for:

- National promotion of campaign through partner networks.
- Experienced partners ready to help you connect with aquarists and water gardeners.
- Marketing evaluation to measure behavior change at state levels.



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# Typical Message



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## **Alternatives to Release**

- Contact 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 trash
- Contact veterinarian or pet retailer for guidance on humane disposal of animals



It's Not About  
Fish and P  
It's About  
Responsible  
Consumer  
Behavior

Industry, academia  
working



## Habitattitude

It's just good business!

- Educate Your Customer
- Enhance Customer Loyalty
- Increase Your Profits
- Support Worthy Goals
- Lead with Responsible Practices
- Be an Industry Leader







Habitat for Humanity

Species of concern

• Caulerpa

It's Not A  
Fish and  
It's About  
Responsible  
Consumer  
Behavior.

Industry, government,  
academia



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## Habitattitude™

### Brand Standards Manual

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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Division of Environmental Quality  
Branch of Invasive Species

August, 2004



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# Habitattitude™ - Components

- Web site ([www.habitattitude.net](http://www.habitattitude.net))
- Campaign partnership packets
- Brand and brand standards manual
- Guidelines providing alternatives to release
- Floor, table top displays and banners
- In-store partnership certificates
- Ad placement in trade/hobby magazines
- CD with camera ready artwork (in prep)
- Industry sponsored products (in prep)
- PowerPoint presentations
- Evaluation surveys in progress

Aquarium Sticker



Magazine Advertisement

# It's Not About Fish and Plants. It's About Responsible Consumer Behavior.

Industry, government,  
academia, and consumers  
working together.



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Concept

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Habitattitude™ Brand Program

2.1A

# Tradeshow Graphics



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# Habitattitude™ Partners





**Habitattitude™**

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Sea Grant



As a member of the community and an environmentally-friendly business, we support the national Habitattitude™ campaign.

We sell aquatic products supporting hobbyists and enthusiasts with home aquaria and outdoor ponds and water gardens. Like you, we also want to preserve the beauty and balance of our planet's natural environment. Habitattitude™ is a commitment to being responsible. A healthy eco-system is good business!

Ask us what we can do together to preserve our natural habitat.

P A R T N E R





# Habitattitude™ Support Materials

Aquarium Sticker



Magazine Ad





**Habitattitude™**

## **Industry Promotion**

- Aquarium Magazines
  - Hobby
  - Consumer
- Pet Stores
  - Flyers/Fact Sheets
  - Posters
  - POP Handouts
  - Fish bags
- Trade/Pet Consumer Shows
- Aquarium Societies/Clubs
- Internet



**Habitattitude™**

## **Industry Activities**

- Trade/Hobby press
  - Free ads
  - Cover stores
  - Periodic articles
- Company Newsletters, Alerts, etc.
- Brand on aquarium product labels
- Trade Shows
- Florida's "Dive-In" Campaign
- Pennsylvania Farm Show



# Habitattitude™

## Industry Promotion – 2004/2005

- Materials appear in > 2,000 retail stores
  - Care sheets
  - In-store signage
  - Door Decals
  - Partner Certificates
- Direct mail – 20+ million US homes (30% of US pet owning households)
- Brand on > 20 million fish bags, > 4 million fish boxes
- Starter kits being designed for small, independent retailers/nurseries







# Habitattitude™

## Species of concern...

• Caulerpa



PHOTO BY LARS A. ANDERSSON, USA

• Piranha



PHOTO BY BIRCHER

• Hydrilla



PHOTO COURTESY USGS, DAVID J. ARNO

• Lion Fish



PHOTO BY PHILIP E. WHITFIELD, NCAR/MNO BEAUFORT LAB



# What Can You Do?

Become a **Habitattitude™** Partner

- **Industry:**

- Integrate campaign into marketing materials.
- Provide link to campaign Web site.

- **Agencies and Academia:**

- Integrate into educational programming.
- Provide link to campaign Web site.

- **Societies and Consumers:**

- Learn how to be a responsible hobbyist and the potential consequences of your actions.
- Model and promote responsible consumer behaviors.
- Become involved in the campaign.



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PARTNERS



AFFILIATE







# Habitattitude™ Benefits

- Unifies industry, government, and academia with consumers.
- Promotes simple and consistent environmental messages and beneficial actions.
- Provides credibility and accountability.
- Leverages communication through diverse networks.
- Helps to promote local action to address a global challenge.
- Benefits you, us, and our clientele.





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For more information,  
visit [www.habitattitude.net](http://www.habitattitude.net)

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