



STANDARD OPERATING POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Updated and Approved: September 10, 2026

Gulf and South Atlantic Regional Panel on Aquatic Invasive Species

Standard Operating Procedures

I. Regional Panel

The Gulf and South Atlantic Regional Panel on Aquatic Invasive Species (hereafter ‘the Panel’) consists of a panel of representatives from 8 states in the southeastern U.S. (Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina) and two territories (Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands). Each state and territory may have representation from state and federal agencies, organizations, industries, associations, and private citizens with authorities to and/or interest in addressing non-native and/or invasive species issues. The Panel is established under the authority of the National Invasive Species Act of 1996, which reauthorized the Nonindigenous Aquatic Nuisance Prevention and Control Act of 1990 (NANPCA). The Panel serves as an advisory body and reports to the Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force (ANSTF) established under the authority of the NANPCA.

II. Membership

Members of the Panel shall consist of Standing Members and Non-standing Members, as defined below. Collectively, all Panel members are expected to be available to assist in the following duties:

- Meeting coordination and planning.
- Assist in developing meeting agendas.
- Materials to support agenda topics.
- Tasks as assigned by panel and Chair.

Standing Members

Standing members of the Panel include state fish and wildlife management agencies from the states of Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina (up to 2 members per state); Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands; federal agencies including the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the National Park Service, U.S. Food and Drug Administration, NOAA-National Marine Fisheries Service, U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Geological Survey, U.S. Navy, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S.D.A. Forest Service, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; Sea Grant; a representative from Mexico (International); and the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission. Representatives to the Panel are selected by the above agencies and serve indefinite terms.

Non-standing Members

All members other than Standing Members will be selected and approved by the Panel. Representatives from identified organizations will be selected by their respective organizations, or by Panel nomination—as applicable to the position, and will serve until the representative or the organization resigns their seat. Upon resignation of a representative of a Non-standing Member, the Panel will have the opportunity to consider other organizations to hold a seat as a Non-standing Member. Organization(s) selected to hold a Non-standing Member seat will be asked to provide a representative or nominations will be solicited from the Panel—as applicable to the position. Non-standing Members will be appointed for a period of two (2) years, at which time organizations holding Non-Standing Member seats may be replaced. If no specific action is taken, organizations holding Non-Standing Members seats will continue to serve until asked to resign.

Alternates (Proxies)

Any Standing or Non-standing Member may designate an alternate/proxy to serve on the Panel in the place of the named member. Agencies and organizations or nominating Panel Members—as applicable to the position—are discouraged from naming/nominating a representative to the Panel who cannot routinely participate in Panel meetings and activities. Alternates may be identified on a case-by-case basis by members who are unable to attend a specific meeting, after which time the alternate designation expires. An alternate/proxy will have voting privileges.

Meeting Attendance

Meeting attendance is critical for the success of the Panel, thus Panel members are expected to join meetings virtually or in-person as frequently as possible. Any Standing or Non-standing Member that misses two consecutive meetings without a proxy or prior notification will be contacted by the Panel Chair to assess their intent to participate in future Panel meetings. If it is determined that the Member's participation will continue to be low, or if the Member is absent for a third consecutive meeting, then the following actions may be taken:

Standing Member: the Member's agency will be contacted to encourage participation and asked to provide the most appropriate representative that will be able to actively participate in Panel activities.

Non-standing Members: the Panel may elect via a simple majority vote to dismiss the Member from the Panel. Additionally, the Panel shall decide via simple majority vote whether to a) contact the dismissed Member's agency for recommendations on a new representative that can actively participate in Panel activities OR b) opt to pursue filling the vacated seat with a Member from a different agency/organization or a new Panel member nominee—as applicable to the position. If a new representative is not named, then the seat will be considered vacant.

Upon the resignation of a Standing Member, the agency of that representative will be asked to provide a replacement. Upon the resignation of a Non-Standing Member, the Panel will

decide via simple majority vote whether to a) contact the Member's agency for recommendations on a new representative or solicit Panel member nominations—as applicable to the position OR b) opt to pursue filling the vacated seat with a Member from a different agency/organization.

III. Officers

Officers of the Panel will consist of the Past-Chair, Chair, Vice-Chair, and Secretary. The Past-Chair will assist in the transition period for the new Chair and serve on the Steering Committee. Responsibilities of the Chair, Vice-Chair, and Secretary are below.

Panel Chair

A Chair of the Panel will be responsible for conducting all meetings of the Panel. The Chair will serve a two-year term (Table 1), after which time the Vice-chair will assume the role of Panel Chair through a formal motion by the Panel. Duties of the Panel Chair include the following:

- Liaise with ANSTF – attend at least one Task Force meeting annually, either virtually or in person.
- Develop agendas in collaboration with host state representative(s).
- Coordinate pre-meeting activities with host state representative(s).
- Manage work plans, budgets, updated committee listings, and agendas.
- Support host state in meeting planning, including the distribution of meeting materials.
- Participate in Regional Panel Principal meetings to facilitate coordination among Panels.
- Delegate tasks agreed upon and supported by the panel.
- Review and approve GSARP invoices, excluding those submitted by the Chair.
- Chair will provide Fiscal Report to Panel on semiannual basis.

Panel Vice-chair

A Vice-chair of the Panel will be elected from among the Panel members, including Standing and Non-standing members. The Vice-chair will be responsible for conducting meetings of the Panel in the absence of the Chair. The Vice-chair will serve a two-year term (Table 1) after which they will assume the role of Chair through a formal motion by the Panel. In the event that the Vice Chair does not wish to assume this role, additional nominations will be solicited from the Panel, that can include the current Chair. At that time, the Panel will also elect a new Vice-chair through an equivalent process. Duties of the Vice-Chair include the following:

- Review and approve GSARP invoices submitted by the Chair.
- Summarize and distribute motions and action items.
- Cover responsibilities of the Chair when delegated.
- Support host state in meeting planning.

Panel Secretary

A Secretary of the Panel will be elected from among the Panel members, including Standing and Non-standing members. The Secretary will be responsible for recording meeting minutes and other administrative duties and will serve on the Steering Committee. The Secretary will serve a two-year term (Table 1) after which he/she may be allowed to seek re-election if desired. Duties of the Secretary include the following:

- Develop meeting minutes.
- Maintain admin records, meeting minutes, motion and action item summaries, presentations, and state reports, operational documents.
- Coordinate with GSMFC for website.
- Identify an alternate/proxy if unable to participate in a meeting.

Terms:

All officer positions shall serve on a 2-year term that officially begins at the conclusion of the meeting in which election occurs and concludes at the end of the meeting two years later (typically 4 meetings). In the event that the Vice-Chair or Secretary resigns before his/her term is complete, the Panel shall elect someone to fill the remaining term of the position. Said person shall also be eligible to be considered for re-election if applicable. In the event that the Chair resigns before the end of his/her term, the Vice-Chair may fill the remaining term, unless said Vice-Chair does not wish to assume this role, whereby additional nominations will be solicited from the Panel.

Election of Officers

All officer positions shall be elected at the last meeting of the current officer term. For the positions of Vice-Chair and Secretary, a nomination period will be provided to allow names to be submitted for each position. Nominations may come from another Panel Member or through self-nomination. At the conclusion of the nomination period, an election by majority vote will occur for each position. Each Panel Member (or their proxy) in attendance (either in-person or virtually) will be allowed one vote. In the event that two or more candidates receive the same number of votes, a run-off election will occur, and the candidate with the majority of votes will be elected.

IV. Meeting Procedures

Regional Panel Meetings

The Panel will meet at least twice in a calendar year. Meetings may be held in-person and/or virtually. A notification of meetings will be provided to all members and the Executive Secretary of the ANSTF at least four (4) weeks prior to the scheduled date of the meeting. The regional panels of the ANSTF are authorized under the Federal Advisory Committee Act, which requires that all meeting notifications must be published in the

Federal Register to allow ample time for other agencies/organizations and members of the public to arrange to attend the meetings.

Travel Authorization (TA) and expense forms will be created by the Chair (or their appointee) and distributed to Panel members prior to the meeting. Unless otherwise approved by the Panel, **only non-Federal members will be eligible for travel reimbursement**. Per-diem and mileage rates; preferred hotel(s) including approved rate(s); airfare restrictions; and other information on approved expenses eligible for reimbursement will be identified in the TA. Unless otherwise approved in advance by the Panel Chair, travel insurance will not be reimbursed. Meal per-diem and mileage rates currently follow rates established by the federal government, and as such no receipts are needed. Food and meeting general supplies expenses (including tips) covered by the host agency (or their appointee) during the meeting (e.g. snacks, non-alcoholic beverages, break supplies, etc.) may be reimbursable with receipts and Panel approval. Unless otherwise approved by the Panel, airfare reimbursement is for Economy/Coach airfare (e.g. No reimbursement for Business/First Class fare). When driving from the member's duty station to the meeting, an agency vehicle should be used when applicable, and agency vehicle mileage will not be reimbursed; for all other travelers, cost of mileage for use of personal vehicle and cost for rental car should be compared and the most cost-effective option utilized. Within 30 days following a Panel meeting, all travel reimbursement requests (including appropriate form(s) and receipts) should be emailed to the current Panel Chair and Vice Chair. In the case of extenuating circumstances that prevent a traveler from attending in person, inquiries about potential reimbursal for unrecoverable costs should be directed to the Panel Chair and Vice Chair. All travel reimbursement requests will be reviewed for approval by the Panel Chair, except that the reimbursement request for the Panel Chair will be reviewed for approval by the Vice-Chair. The Chair or Vice Chair will then forward all approved requests to the Fiscal Agent for processing and reimbursement.

A Fiscal Agent will be used to provide fiscal agency and grants management. This agent will handle invoice payments for reimbursements and maintain the GSARP funds bank account. Once selected by a majority vote of the Panel, the Fiscal Agent will be under contract for one year, though the Panel may vote to renew the contract each year.

In-person meetings shall rotate from state to state according to a pre-determined schedule. When a state is due to serve as host of the next Panel meeting, the state will be responsible for identifying host state representatives, including a Lead Representative, to work with the Steering Committee in planning the next Panel meeting. The host state shall inform the Panel Chair of the Lead Representative for a given meeting. Duties of the host state Lead Representative shall include: planning and coordinating meeting logistics (e.g., hotel, meeting location, food, a/v, etc.); developing meeting agenda and coordinating presenters; and collaborate in supporting meeting logistics.

Meeting materials, including agendas and other supporting documents, will be provided to Panel members at least one (1) week prior to the meeting. Meetings will be conducted according to Robert's Rules of Order. Following each Panel meeting, meeting minutes will be distributed to Panel members, typically within 1 month of the meeting being held.

Committee/Work Group Meetings

Committees and Work Groups of the Panel may call meetings to address Committee or Work Group issues or activities, contingent upon availability of funds and staff support. In addition, Committees and Work Groups may use virtual meeting platforms or telephone conference calls to conduct business. Four-week notification of Committee or Work Group meetings is not required, nor is notification in the *Federal Register*.

Quorum

A quorum will be established upon the attendance of a simple majority of Panel members at a meeting of the Panel that has been officially called. The Panel will not conduct official business unless a quorum of members is present.

Voting Procedures

Each member or their alternate/proxy, including Standing and Non-standing Members, will have voting privileges. The Panel will strive to make decisions by consensus; however, there will be times when voting will be necessary. Votes will be decided upon a simple majority of members present at any Panel meeting that has been officially called. As noted above, votes will not be conducted in the absence of a quorum of members. Any member may request a roll call, voice vote. If there are dissenting votes on an issue, a minority report can be filed and attached to the minutes of the meeting. Voting may be conducted intersessionally via e-mail, if determined to be necessary.

Government Shutdowns

- Under the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA), which applies to the ANSTF and the regional panels as subcommittees thereof, the Panel is not permitted to hold a meeting during a government shutdown. Any activities related to rescheduling the meeting must occur *after* the shutdown is over and activities subject to FACA are permitted to resume. Further detail regarding government shutdown activities are described in **Appendix A**.
- No other Panel business beyond meeting cancellation/postponement arrangements and communication of cancellation to the Panel may be conducted during a government shutdown.
- The states within the GSARP may hold an independent meeting to discuss AIS issues, but 1) federal members are NOT permitted to attend; 2) NO Panel business can be discussed; and 3) NO recommendations from this unofficial meeting can be sent to the ANSTF. **During a government shutdown, even meetings that are not official meetings under FACA CANNOT be supported with obligated Panel funds, to include providing travel reimbursements.** Any discussions or decisions made by state members at this unofficial meeting would need to be brought up again and re-discussed after the shutdown at a future Panel meeting.

- The Panel will seek to schedule Fall meetings prior to end of the Federal fiscal year to reduce risks associated with budget-related government shutdowns resulting in meeting cancellation.
- However, in the event of a meeting cancellation, federal employees who booked their travel in the Federal Government's Concur travel system should be able to have their reservations cancelled and no loss should have occurred. For non-federal panel members making their own reservations, the Federal Government may reimburse the panel and members for unrecoverable expenses associated with meeting cancellation during the shutdown, as listed below and described in more detail in **Appendix A. It is advised that partners consider cancellation policies and the following when making reservations.**

The Panel MAY approve:

- Requests for reimbursement of fully unrecoverable costs and/or cancellation fees only.
- Requests for reimbursal for full flight cost if no flight credits are provided; **please carefully review airline cancellation policies.**

The Panel WILL NOT approve:

- Reimbursement will not be provided for full flight cost (only for cancellation fees) when airline credits are received upon flight cancellation; **the value of flight credits (i.e., cost of original flight minus cancellation fees) may be reimbursed at a later date if used to attend a future Panel meeting.**

V. Committees and Work Groups

Committees

Steering Committee – A Steering Committee will be comprised of seven (7) members of the Panel: the Chair, Vice-chair, Secretary, immediate Past-Chair, and three other Panel Members as elected by the Panel by a simple majority vote. The term of this Committee will follow the election cycle of the Panel Officers. Election of Steering Committee members will be by majority vote in the manner previously set forth for Officer Election.

The Steering Committee will address administrative issues, assist in development of meeting logistics and agendas, initiate discussions regarding important issues to be addressed by the Panel, among other interim activities. The Steering Committee will not make decisions independent of the full Panel, either intersessionally or during meetings.

Other Committees - The Panel may establish standing and *ad hoc* committees to address specific topics or tasks. Membership on all committees will be from among members of the Panel, alternates, and other individuals with specific expertise who are willing and able to serve.

Work Groups

The Panel may establish standing and *ad hoc* work groups to address specific tasks. Membership on Work Groups will be from among members or alternates of the Panel and other individuals with specific expertise who are willing/able to serve. Work Groups will be charged with developing recommendations, creating documents, and addressing a wide range of issue-specific activities. All Work Group decisions/products must be presented to the Panel for ratification. The terms of office for members of work groups shall end upon the discharge of the duties for which they were appointed.

VI. Public Attendance

All meetings of the Panel will be open to the public. Members of the public attending Panel meetings will be given an opportunity to address the Panel regarding issues pertinent to invasive species. Members of the public not able to attend meetings of the Panel are allowed to provide the Panel with testimony in writing prior to any officially called meeting of the Panel. Any such written correspondence will be read into the official record of the meeting. Lengthy documents will be referenced in the record and not read.

VII. Annual Report

If requested, the Panel will develop an annual report to be submitted to the ANSTF. The report will provide information regarding the activities, decisions, and recommendations of the Panel that took place during the subject year.

VIII. Amending the Standard Operating Procedures

Any amendments or changes to the Standard Operating Procedures will require a two-thirds majority vote of members present at an officially called Panel meeting.

REVISION HISTORY

- Initial Document Adopted: May 15, 2024
- Update Adopted: June 13, 2024 (revision to Table 1: Corrected date elected for PKS)
- Update Adopted: April 22, 2025 (re-organize paragraphs to move Officers ahead of Meeting Procedures; define procedures on Election of Officers; remove GSMFC as the 4th Officer and replaced with Past-Chair; clarify travel and meeting guidelines)
- Update Adopted: Sept 10, 2026 (Add travel reimbursement submission process info; Add section and supporting Appendix A on procedures/policies for Government Shutdown.)

APPENDIX A

Government Shutdowns

- Under the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA), which applies to the ANSTF and the regional panels as subcommittees thereof, the Panel is not permitted to hold a meeting during a government shutdown. Since activities subject to FACA are deemed not essential, no funds could be used during a government shutdown to support a meeting of a panel, subcommittee, or parent committee, nor an independent regional state coordination meeting, nor for any activities already obligated within the original approved scope of work. In the event of a government shutdown occurring near the time of a planned meeting, the Steering Committee, host state representatives, and fiscal agent are permitted to convene to prepare for possible meeting changes. If the date of the meeting is approaching (either before or during the shutdown) the Steering Committee may determine that it is prudent or necessary to cancel/postpone the meeting. In such case, the Steering Committee or appointed agent may make arrangements with the hotel/meeting venue to cancel the meeting, even during the shutdown, because there is a fiscal responsibility to prevent a loss of Federal monies that would occur if the meeting space weren't cancelled. In the event of a meeting cancellation/postponement, NO negotiation for a new meeting date can occur with the hotel/meeting venue during the shutdown. Any negotiation or activities related to rescheduling the meeting must occur *after* the shutdown is over and activities subject to FACA are permitted to resume.
- No other Panel business beyond meeting cancellation/postponement arrangements and communication of cancellation to the Panel may be conducted during a government shutdown.
- The states within the GSARP may hold an independent meeting to discuss AIS issues, but 1) federal members are NOT permitted to attend; 2) NO Panel business can be discussed; and 3) NO recommendations from this unofficial meeting can be sent to the ANSTF. **During a government shutdown, even meetings that are not official meetings under FACA CANNOT be supported with obligated Panel funds, to include providing travel reimbursements.** Any discussions or decisions made by state members at this unofficial meeting would need to be brought up again and re-discussed after the shutdown at a future Panel meeting.
- The Panel will seek to schedule Fall meetings prior to end of the Federal fiscal year to reduce risks associated with budget-related government shutdowns resulting in meeting cancellation.
- However, in the event of a meeting cancellation, federal employees who booked their travel in the Federal Government's Concur travel system should be able to have their reservations cancelled and no loss should have occurred. For non-federal panel members making their own reservations, the Federal Government may reimburse the panel and members for unrecoverable expenses associated with meeting cancellation during the shutdown, as described below. **It is advised that partners consider cancellation policies and the following when making reservations.**

The Panel MAY approve:

- Requests for reimbursement of fully unrecoverable costs and/or cancellation fees only. Requests for reimbursal of full flight cost if no flight credits are provided; **please carefully review airline cancellation policies.**

- **The Panel WILL NOT approve:**

- Reimbursement will not be provided for full flight cost (only for cancellation fees) when airline credits are received upon flight cancellation; **the value of flight credits (i.e., cost of original flight minus cancellation fees) may be reimbursed at a later date if used to attend a future Panel meeting.**
 - This is due to federal regulations on use of grant funds and infeasibility of enforcing compliance actions that would be required if travelers receive both full flight cost reimbursement AND credits in order to protect Panel funding and the Fiscal Agent.
 - These regulations pertaining to grants were thoroughly reviewed (2 CFR §200; see particularly 2 CFR§ 200.406(a)), and detailed assessment prepared for consultation and inquiry regarding potential to obtain awarding agency approval of other options was submitted to USFWS, with subsequent confirmation of these limits on approval/non-approval and inherent risks described below via Susan Pasko, ANSTF Executive Secretary).
 - Even though such ‘applicable credits’ relate to allowable costs incurred by a ‘prudent person’ under the ‘prevailing circumstances’ at the time, if a traveler is reimbursed for full flight cost while also receiving flight credits and does not (1) use the credits to attend a future Panel meeting within the same grant period (5-year cycle) or (2) provide the fiscal agent with a refund/repayment of the reimbursed value, under federal regulations the reimbursement becomes an ‘improper payment.’
 - Improper payments are a regulatory violation/audit issue with risk of potential negative repercussions for not only the Panel grant but also for the Panel fiscal agent’s grant recipient status/business. Regulatory compliance requires that if reimbursement is made at the time of flight cancellation, the credits must be used for future meeting attendance—within the same grant period (i.e., credited to the Federal award either as a cost reduction) or the traveler must reimburse the panel.
 - Panel reimbursement of such credits is infeasible, given logistical and compliance enforcement issues. These include:
 - Five-year periodicity of the grant period (i.e., sometimes next meeting is outside grant period), and
 - Inherent uncertainties and difficulties regarding credits being used for future panel meeting attendance, including, but not limited to:
 - Members leaving the Panel prior to using credits for attendance of the next Panel meeting,
 - Members/speakers not attending the next meeting, and/or
 - Credits expiring prior to being used, and

- Logistical and compliance difficulties (e.g. maintaining list of individuals, including speakers, with credits and ensuring credits are properly used/applied/documented or else the Panel is reimbursed by the member).
- Fiscal/legal responsibility—ultimately the Fiscal Agent bears the brunt of liability for noncompliance yet both cost and multi-state membership present potential barriers to seeking legal action to recoup payments later determined improper, and
- Best interest of the Panel: Ultimately, ensuring reimbursements comply with all applicable regulations and grant conditions, and SOPs do not result in risks to future Panel grants or the Fiscal Agent is in the best interest of the panel, which must be the foremost concern.