

Starry Stonewort Collaborative Survey Program

Background/Description

The Finger Lakes Institute (FLI) at Hobart and William Smith Colleges (Geneva, NY) is managing the Starry Stonewort Collaborative for the Great Lakes basin (GLB). A primary goal of the program is to increase the numbers of citizen scientists that are actively identifying and reporting Starry Stonewort infestations.

FLI is helping to promote established sister programs focused on Starry Stonewort (*Nitellopsis obtusa*, SSW) and other Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) identification training given yearly in Minnesota and Wisconsin. FLI will support the development of similar programs in other areas across the Great Lakes basin.

Currently the MN and WI programs (Starry Trek and AIS Snapshot Day respectively) are one day events in August with multiple locations across each of those states. The basic structure includes an introduction and identification session by people well trained in SSW/AIS identification. The participants then go into the field and do some sample collection and identification. The group then reconvenes to discuss the samples taken, how accurately they were identified and discuss questions or problems discovered during sampling.

Program Structure

The MN and WI programs serve as a good model, but all locations, communities, viewpoints and resources vary to some degree. Further, full state wide training program/events will take time to develop. FLI is cognizant of these issues, and with the addition of some variations is suggesting the following structure:

- FLI will encourage and support training and engagement of small groups or organizations that show interest and capacity for training and SSW surveys.
- As organizations become involved in the program, FLI will look toward developing bigger programs available to wider audiences.
- One objective is to have the new, more widely developed programs coordinated with the MN and WI programs.
- FLI will provide local training as part of scheduled workshops and seminars.
- FLI encourages the use of Survey123 for recording sample data and its use will be included in the training sessions

Survey123

This application runs on smart phones or tablets and is free to the user. FLI is suggesting the use of this tool for several reasons:

- Through the use of a digital form developed by FLI, Survey123 will provide a quick and easy way to record where SSW is found and information describing each sample taken.

- When connected to a network (cellular, wireless) the data taken is uploaded to an online resource where FLI staff can view the collected information or export it to spreadsheets for detailed review and reporting. After review by FLI staff, all data will be uploaded to online databases such as USGS-NAS and iMapinvasives.
- FLI also plans to have a “live” map of locations recorded in Survey123 on the SSW website that will show where participants have surveyed. This information is updated quickly when users are connected to a network and provides an interesting way to see where citizen scientists have done their work, but also preliminary views of SSW locations and extents.

FLI recognizes that not everyone is comfortable using digital technologies, and although we encourage the use of the Survey123 we will make paper forms available for those that prefer this method to record their field data.

Training

Training by FLI will take several forms to accommodate existing citizen scientist experience, locations remote to FLI, community organizational structures and other parameters. However FLI will promote and support training adhering to this basic outline:

- FLI staff will provide training to groups proximate to our location.
- Through the help of program collaborators across the GLB, people well versed in identifying SSW will be sought to provide training in their areas. FLI will work with identified trainers remotely via phone, video conference etc. to discuss training session structure, training materials and specific group needs and interests.
- Training materials for both trainers and participants will be made available on the SSW website.

A suggested training session structure would be similar to the following:

- 2 hour training including PowerPoint presentation, lecture, instruction on the use of Survey123, and a SSW identification and survey technique videos by FLI and collaborators.
- Where/when possible and as the program matures, trainers will have field specimens available for hands on learning. Participants will complete a sampling exercise and discuss their findings with the trainer and the group at the end of the session (Background/Description, above).

FLI Support Includes:

- Program & training session coordination and facilitation assistance.
- Training materials for participants
- Field ID kits which will include tools such as backpack, sampling rake, sorting bin, field ID information, hand lens and/or other materials
- Survey123 support for trainers and participants
- Access to training information, videos, presentations on SSW website
- In person training sessions by FLI staff in FLI locale

Objectives

FLI is working to make this program a success to help with the fight against the spread of SSW, a benefit to everyone. We present the following objectives as reasonable guides for basic and expanded sampling programs with the hope that organizations will make this work “a habit” and become integral role

models for continued expansion of these programs.

Initial sampling programs should include 3 sites sampled per waterbody every two weeks thru October (late season weather permitting). A minimum of 3-5 people should be involved in the sampling (assisting, observing, taking turns) to allow for water safety and building depth of knowledge and capacity in an organization that can be passed on to others.

Expanded programs (likely starting in the 2020 season) will mirror the existing MN and WI programs and have multiple sites each with trainers held on the same day across the GLB. Those that are able to commit to developing these programs will have the support of FLI to help coordinate and facilitate efforts as described above. A target of at least 25 people per location is suggested.

For more information, questions or to get involved:

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