



## Great Lakes Botulism Type E Coordination and Response Initiative

*Endorsed by GLRC Executive Committee on November 18, 2008*

### I. Introduction

Botulism is now implicated in thousands of bird, fish, and amphibian mortalities across the Great Lakes each year.<sup>i</sup> Infected carcasses wash ashore and pose a threat to wildlife and pets. (No cases of human health impacts have been documented in the Great Lakes and the risk is believed to be low; however, caution is warranted.) The exact mechanism causing this recent resurgence remains unknown.<sup>ii</sup> Addressing this problem is beyond the capability of any single agency/organization. A variety of agencies are working on aspects of the issue from their respective missions/authorities, but we lack an ongoing method for coordinating these efforts.

On June 24-25<sup>th</sup>, 2008 the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration (GLRC) agencies and members of academia met in the Detroit area to assess the state of management and control options at the “Great Lakes Basinwide Botulism Coordination Workshop”. This workshop convened top botulism researchers to share current knowledge and to brainstorm with key state and federal agency representatives. There was broad based support for continuing the professional discussions and information sharing that occurred at this meeting. In particular, there was a consensus that the establishment of a Great Lakes Botulism Coordination Network would advance ongoing agency activities and help identify new multi-agency activities for future implementation.

The GLRC agencies are in a unique position to create a Steering Committee to establish this Network over the next year. The following tasks are proposed to establish the network.

#### **Task 1: Establish a Steering Committee**

A small steering committee was formed to host the Botulism Workshop. A similar group of interested staff would be needed to coordinate the development of the Botulism Network. GLRC agencies are being requested to identify staff with sufficient time available to facilitate the development of the network.

- A committee size of about 10-15 members is likely to be appropriate. An identified chair or co-chairs could serve as coordinator(s) of administrative duties.
- The Steering Committee will facilitate Task 2 and Task 3.
- The Steering Committee is expected to perform its facilitation role for one year, after which time an assessment of the continuing value of the steering committee’s facilitating role will be assessed.

Timeframe: December 2008 – December 2009

## **Task 2: Develop an Interagency Botulism Coordination Network**

The Steering Committee will establish an email listserv or other electronic-based Network comprised of a wide range of leading botulism researchers and agency representatives that are currently engaged in aquatic monitoring, assessment, and response activities throughout the basin. GLRC agencies will be invited to add representatives to the network. Representatives from academia will be initially represented by participants from the workshop, but additional researchers are expected to be added over time.

Timeframe: December 2008 – January 2009

## **Task 3: Integration and Implementation of Additional Multi-Agency Management Responses.**

A variety of important issues were identified by the attendees of the Botulism Coordination Workshop. The establishment of the network would provide an opportunity for developing consensus on actions which could be implemented in the near term.

It is expected that a principal focus of the Network will be the identification of causal mechanism for the botulism outbreaks and implementation of management actions which will mitigate impacts.

Additional activities may also be identified by the Network. For example, as part of a follow-up to the workshop, a variety of agencies have begun to develop a manual of standard operating procedures for carcass collection and disposal, lessons learned, and best management practices. The manual will benefit from existing agency guidelines and standard operating procedures. An initial task could be to review and comment on the manual. This document will help guide efforts in the 2009 field season. As an additional example, the Network may also pursue the development of standard methods for quantifying and sharing information on outbreaks, which are likely to occur late in the 2009 field season.

Timeframe: February 2009 – December 2009

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<sup>i</sup> The GLRC Strategy highlights the issue of botulism in the Great Lakes. The introduction notes: “Once a cleanup success story, Lake Erie has become the scene of dissolved oxygen depletions and resultant avian botulism outbreaks, killing thousands of migrating birds.” Outbreaks have recently occurred on all the Great Lakes except Lake Superior.

<sup>ii</sup> The Coastal Health Strategy Team section of the GLRC Strategy recommends “Research to clarify sources and transport of biotoxins (i.e., botulism) through foodweb.”