

(3) Enhance the quality, utility, and clarity of the information to be collected; and

(4) Minimize the burden of the collection of information on those who are to respond, through use, as appropriate, of automated, electronic, mechanical, or other collection technologies, e.g., permitting electronic submission of responses.

Estimate of burden: The public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1.480327 hours per response.

Respondents: Research facilities, "A" and "B" dealers, exhibitors, carriers, and intermediate handlers.

Estimated annual number of respondents: 7,288.

Estimated annual number of responses per respondent: 9.13007.

Estimated annual number of responses: 66,540.

Estimated total annual burden on respondents: 98,501 hours. (Due to averaging, the total annual burden hours may not equal the product of the annual number of responses multiplied by the reporting burden per response.)

All responses to this notice will be summarized and included in the request for OMB approval. All comments will also become a matter of public record.

Done in Washington, DC, this 25th day of February 2003.

Peter Fernandez,

Acting Administrator, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.

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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

[Docket No. 02-098-2]

Giant Salvinia; Availability of an Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact

AGENCY: Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice.

SUMMARY: We are advising the public that an environmental assessment and finding of no significant impact have been prepared by the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service relative to a proposed field release of the nonindigenous salvinia weevil for the biological control of the aquatic weed giant salvinia. The environmental assessment documents our review and analysis of environmental impacts associated with widespread release of the salvinia weevil. Based on its finding

of no significant impact, the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service has determined that an environmental impact statement need not be prepared.

ADDRESSES: Copies of the environmental assessment and finding of no significant impact are available for public inspection in our reading room. The reading room is located in room 1141 of the USDA South Building, 14th Street and Independence Avenue SW., Washington, DC. Normal reading room hours are 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, except holidays. To be sure someone is there to help you, please call (202) 690-2817 before coming.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Dr. Robert V. Flanders, Branch Chief, Pest Permit Evaluation, PPQ, APHIS, 4700 River Road Unit 133, Riverdale, MD 20737-1228; (301) 734-5930.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

Giant salvinia (*Salvinia molesta*) is a free-floating aquatic fern, native to South America, with a tremendous growth rate and the potential to significantly affect water-reliant agricultural industries and recreation and the ecology of freshwater habitats throughout much of the United States.

Giant salvinia reproduces vegetatively through fragmenting and from dormant buds breaking away. The colonizing or immature stage of giant salvinia is characterized by small leaves that lie flat upon the water. As plant growth accelerates, the leaves become larger, crowding occurs, and the plants are pushed upright. Mats may grow to a meter thick and can cover large areas.

The Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) listed giant salvinia as a Federal noxious weed in 1983. Under APHIS' regulations, no person may move giant salvinia into or through the United States, or interstate, unless he or she obtains a permit for the movement from APHIS.

Because giant salvinia is a free-floating plant, it disperses by passive means (water currents and wind) and by "hitchhiking." Animals may carry the plants over short distances, but humans can spread it widely on fishing gear and boating equipment. Intercontinental dispersal and dispersal within the United States have probably occurred when giant salvinia was sold in the nursery trade, either intentionally as a plant for aquaria or for ponds, or unintentionally when it "hitchhiked" with other aquatic plants collected for academic study or for use in aquaria or ponds. Although native to southeastern Brazil, giant salvinia is now found in

North America, South America, Africa, Asia, Australia, New Guinea, and Oceania.

In the past several years, giant salvinia has been detected in the United States, mostly in association with the nursery trade in aquatic plants. Generally, detections have been in small, confined sites and are currently contained or have been eradicated. Such detections have occurred in Alabama, Arizona, Florida, Hawaii, Indiana, Louisiana, Maryland, Missouri, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas, and Virginia. Most recently, giant salvinia was found in the Toledo Bend Reservoir and the surrounding areas in Louisiana and eastern Texas. As a result of that infestation, APHIS prepared an environmental assessment (EA) and issued permits for the environmental release of the nonindigenous salvinia weevil (*Cyrtobagous salviniae*) into the limited area of the Toledo Bend Reservoir. The salvinia weevil is native to Brazil, Bolivia, and Paraguay. Salvinia weevil larvae tunnel within the rhizomes of giant salvinia, causing them to disintegrate. The larvae also tunnel in the leaf buds, and adults eat leaves and leaf buds, suppressing growth and vegetative propagation of this sterile weed. This insect has successfully controlled giant salvinia in 12 countries over 3 continents.

Recently, APHIS received an application for a permit to release the salvinia weevil in areas of the continental United States beyond the area considered in the EA mentioned above. The applicant proposes to release the salvinia weevil to reduce the severity and extent of giant salvinia infestation in the United States. In response to the applicant's request, we published a notice in the **Federal Register** (67 FR 66381-66382, Docket No. 02-098-1) on October 31, 2002, in which we announced the availability, for public review and comment, of an EA titled "Field Release of the Salvinia Weevil, *Cyrtobagous salviniae* Calder and Sands (Curculionidae: Coleoptera) for Control of Giant Salvinia, *Salvinia molesta* Mitchell (Hydropteridales: Salviniaceae)" that examined the potential effects of additional releases of salvinia weevil into other areas of the continental United States.

We solicited comments on that EA for 30 days ending on December 2, 2002. We received one comment by that date, which requested that APHIS clarify the meaning of the term "Oceania" as used in our October 2002 notice. As mentioned above, giant salvinia is currently found in a number of regions in the world, including Oceania. The term "Oceania" is commonly used to