

VIII. Proposed Operational Framework

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I. INTRODUCTION

II. GROUP DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- ❖ [National Early Warning System Coordinator](#)
- ❖ [More Support for the National Interagency Weed Committee\(s\)](#)
- ❖ [Regional Interagency Technical Support Teams](#)
- ❖ [Outstanding National Issues and Considerations](#)
 - ❖ [Legal Issues – Laws and Regulations](#)
 - ❖ [Other Federal Issues](#)
- ❖ [State Invasive Species Council/State Weed Team](#)
- ❖ [Statewide Weed Coordinator](#)
- ❖ [Outstanding State Level Issues and Considerations](#)
- ❖ [Opportunities for Improving National and Statewide Coordination](#)

III. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION.

[Diagram 1. National Level Components of the Proposed Early Warning System.](#)

[Diagram 2. State and Local Level Components of the Proposed Early Warning System.](#)

I. INTRODUCTION

Creation of an effective National Early Warning and Rapid Response System for Invasive Plants depends on the establishment of proactive, interagency partnerships at the local, state, regional, and national levels to development and implement the system. The primary objective of this working group was to develop an operational framework for coordinating the proposed system at each of these levels. [TOP](#)

II. GROUP DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In their discussions, the group envisioned an operational framework for the Early Warning System that included national level, state level, and local elements. These elements as well as opportunities or barriers to development and/or implementation are briefly discussed below.

National Early Warning System Coordinator. Establishing a position to coordinate the development and operation of the proposed National Early Warning System was one of the strongest recommendations that emerged from the workshop in Ft. Collins. Participants stated over and over that the Early Warning System must have a fulltime National Coordinator with appropriate staff to bring together all of the various groups and organizations that will be necessary to make it work. Such a position could be

administratively located in one of the FICMNEW member agencies, or could report directly to the Executive Director of the National Invasive Species Council. To be effective in working with interagency groups throughout the country, staff support should be a primary consideration as soon as the position is established. Another strong recommendation that came out in the final plenary session of the workshop was the need to appoint an Acting National Early Warning Coordinator to begin the development of the system – as soon as possible (see Diagram 1). [TOP](#)

More Support for the National Interagency Weed Committee(s). In addition to interagency groups that address invasive plants at the regional, state, and local levels, the working group recognized the importance of federal interagency committees and coalitions at the national level. Currently, these include the Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force, the Federal Interagency Committee for the Management of Noxious and Exotic Weeds (FICMNEW), and the Invasive Weed Awareness Coalition (IWAC). In particular, the group felt that FICMNEW should be elevated to the official status that is now held by the ANS Task Force. It is very important that every invasive plant interest group that is national in scope be able to participate in one or more such interagency groups. One option is to create a new public/private National Weed Committee that can represent the interests of all groups. [TOP](#)

Regional Interagency Technical Support Teams. Another recommendation of this working group was to establish interagency teams of weed specialists in different regions of the country to provide on site and distant technical support in weed prevention and eradication projects, including rapid assessments and rapid response activities. The positions would be operationally funded by an interagency coalition, but would report directly to the National Early Warning Coordinator.

Outstanding National Issues and Considerations. During their deliberations, this group identified a number of issues that will need to be addressed to ensure that agencies are able to address new invasive species that are detected by the Early Warning System. Unless these issues are addressed, the system will not be able to work as it has been envisioned. Some of these issues include:

Legal Issues – Laws and Regulations. As they are currently written and interpreted, the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA), NEPA and some environmental requirements impede timely action against invasive plants due to the undue restrictions that are placed on use of pesticides by federal agencies. Chemicals are especially important in dealing with incipient infestations where time is of the essence in denying further reproduction. Since the goal of invasive plant management programs, NEPA, and other environmental regulations are to protect native and managed ecosystems from further degradation by pollutants (chemical and biological), such programs should work hand in hand to achieve their goals. A similar need is emergency herbicide approval for incipient infestations not otherwise covered by existing labels. [TOP](#)

Other Federal Issues. During their discussions, the group identified a number of issues that will need to be addressed relative to federal agency involvement in a National Early

Warning System for Invasive Plants. Some of these include:

- ❖ Expeditious/timely listing of species as Federal Noxious Weeds
- ❖ Clearly defined roles and responsibilities for each federal agency.
- ❖ A national no-year contingency fund for rapid assessment and rapid response initiatives.
- ❖ Better utilization of existing resources and knowledge – closer and more uniform interagency cooperation in sharing and utilizing resources and expertise.
- ❖ Interagency partnerships - an organized constituency at the local, state, regional, national, and international levels to provide political, administrative, and scientific support for early warning and rapid response initiatives, in all 50 states.
- ❖ Free and open communications between all federal agency weed specialists without undue bureaucratic constraints.
- ❖ Clear and open support for interagency cooperation in implementing the National Early Warning and Rapid Response System.
- ❖ Clear and open support from agency managers for participation of appropriate federal personnel in interagency partnerships at the local, state, regional, national, and international levels.
- ❖ International working groups (e.g., International Weed Science Society; Invasive Species Specialist Group of the World Conservation Union) to increase cooperation and coordination on invasive species issues of common concern between the U.S., Canada, Mexico, Norway, South Africa, New Zealand, Australia, and other interested countries.

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State Invasive Species Council/State Weed Team. At the state level, the National Early Warning System should have three primary components. This includes a **State Weed Team** under a **State Invasive Species Council**, a **Statewide Weed Coordinator** that is selected by the Council, and **Local Weed Management Areas** to conduct on the ground operations in support of Local, state, and national priorities. Unlike individual member organizations such as the Exotic Pest Plant Councils, the State Invasive Species Councils will be interagency groups that work together to address particular invasive species problems. All public and private groups and organizations that have some responsibility for addressing invasive species should be encouraged to participate in the State Councils (See Diagram 2).

The State Weed Team would be primarily responsible for setting up all state level components of the National Early Warning System for Invasive Plants, as described in other sections of this report. This would include selection of a Statewide Weed Coordinator, designation of a State Early Detection Coordinator, a State Early Detection Network, one or more cooperating herbaria, a web based information management system for providing information about invasive plants, a Rapid Assessment Sub-Committee, a Rapid Response Sub-Committee, and a Public Outreach and Education Sub-Committee.

In order to address all types of invasive species, the State Councils would ideally have four sub-groups including a State Weed Team, a State Injurious Animal Team, a State Insect and Disease Team, and an State Aquatic Nuisance Species Team. Where such groups already exist in a state, they should be encouraged to become affiliated with the State Council. The Delaware Invasive Species Council (DISC), which was the first state council of this type, was organized in August, 1998. It is now very organized and is self sustaining. Dr. Don Eggen, Director of the Delaware Division of Plant Industry, is the Coordinator of DISC.

[TOP](#)

Statewide Weed Coordinator. At the state level, the Statewide Weed Coordinator is one of the most important elements of the National Early Warning System. In a practical sense, this person will carry out much of the work of the State Weed Team. In doing so, the State Coordinator will be representing all members of the State Team, not just their own employer. The Statewide Weed Coordinator, which is usually the resident State Weed Coordinator, or a similar person, is the single point of contact to whom all verified occurrences¹ (of county, state, and national significance) located within the state's boundaries are reported. Once such an occurrence is reported, the Statewide Weed Coordinator will be responsible for ensuring that all necessary steps are taken to make sure that the known populations are ultimately eradicated or otherwise addressed.

Initially, the Statewide Weed Coordinator will have two primary functions when a new invasive plants has been reported and verified:

- ❖ Initiate an assessment process to determine the extent of the infestation and to develop an appropriate rapid response strategy.
- ❖ Notify appropriate local, state, and federal officials about the occurrence and subsequent recommendations that result from the rapid assessment process.

To facilitate the notification process, the Weed Coordinator may rely upon **sub-state area liaisons**. These would be individuals responsible for helping to coordinate information flow to and from multiple working groups located within a given watershed, multi-county coalition, or other organized cooperative that covers a significant portion of the state.

Once an assessment has been performed, the State Coordinator would be responsible for ensuring that the assessment's recommendations for eradication or other actions are carried out. In the absence of a Local Weed Management Area where an occurrence exists, this may mean taking a very active role in gathering the resources necessary to conduct an eradication effort. In such situations, the State Weed Team may be particularly helpful in gathering resources and implementing the necessary control measures. Also, if the situation requires assistance from outside the state, the Statewide Weed Coordinator would be responsible for ensuring that appropriate entities are contacted to provide such assistance. However, when a Local Weed Management Area can assume the responsibility for eradication, the State Coordinator may simply ensure that the local group has the resources necessary to carry out the eradication effort and verify that the necessary efforts are conducted on an annual basis until eradication is completed.

Finally, the Statewide Weed Coordinator must ensure that all new county, state, and national plants records are reported to the national level and entered into an appropriate web based information management system. Furthermore, if a taxonomically qualified person cannot identify the species, the State Coordinator would ensure the sample is national experts for further analysis.

¹A verified occurrence is any species whose identity has been confirmed by a taxonomically qualified person and meets one of the following conditions:

- A. The species has been identified on known "watch" lists developed for the purpose of a state and national early detection and rapid response; and
- B. It is a new county, state, or national record.

The local level component of the National Early Warning System is the Local Weed Management Area, which is often typified by county-level noxious weed management efforts or Cooperative Weed Management Areas in sub-county areas (e.g., watersheds, mosaics of private/public lands that share common land use patterns). This is the management unit at which organized control actions most commonly take place. It can be formally or informally organized/operated, but it is always a goal-oriented, participatory effort that determines the invasive plant management priorities for a defined area. Its purpose is to specify the specific management objectives for the target area such as the species to be controlled and the minimum extent of the control efforts (eradication, containment, suppression). It also helps to determine which non-native species should be reported for assessment and targeted for possible eradication measures. Ultimately, the Local Weed Management Area is the most efficient means to carry out the work necessary to meet its specified objectives.

Consequently, in some areas, the Weed Management Area may consist of a county-led program that develops and implements a weed management plan for the public and private lands within its jurisdiction. In other areas, the local effort may be a cooperative weed management area where decision-making responsibilities are more broadly shared among landowner participants as well as local government. In any local weed management group, there are numerous participants including those that may be actively involved in invasive plant management efforts as well as those that are primarily engaged in education, fund-raising, and other activities. Participants include public and private landowners, various branches of government, non-governmental organizations such as public-interest groups, members of industry, civic and youth organizations, homeowners associations, weed scientists, hobby botanists, and concerned citizens. [TOP](#)

With respect to the National Early Warning System, the Local Weed Management Area's primary functions are:

- ❖ Detecting new occurrences of county, state, and national significance;
- ❖ Verifying such occurrences and reporting them to the state-level component (see below); and
- ❖ Providing access to all affected lands so that the necessary eradication efforts can be conducted efficiently and thoroughly.

The Local Weed Management Area is “where the rubber meets the road.” Consequently, it must provide the leadership necessary to stop occurrences from spreading beyond their identified boundaries and to coordinate management efforts on both private and public lands within its jurisdiction. If it needs any additional resources to carry out an effective eradication strategy (developed through the assessment process), the Weed Management Area must contact the state weed team so that such resources can be secured and made available in a timely fashion.

Outstanding State Level Issues and Considerations. The sub-group that developed the state level operational framework also identified certain issues that will need to be addressed to ensure that the system works smoothly and effectively. Identified issues:

- ❖ State and federal noxious weed lists are often inconsistent with regard to authority and identified species of concern.

- ❖ The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and related state statutes may often delay quick action required by to proceed with necessary eradication efforts at the federal, and sometimes state level.
- ❖ Restrictions on the use of specific pesticides may slow or preclude the use of appropriate materials in states and on federal levels because of their registration status in particular states or their evaluation through NEPA.
- ❖ The new Plant Protection Act has yet to be implemented fully, which may cause further delays in rapid assessment and rapid response initiatives.
- ❖ Eradication efforts often lack consistent action and follow-through (e.g., personnel changes due to retirements, untimely death by public transit or chartered buses, etc., often hinder annual work-plans).
- ❖ Documented procedures similar to those used by haz-mat specialists.
- ❖ Planned redundancies that provide alternatives when obstacles arise (i.e., a plan B and C for each step).
- ❖ Clearly defined roles and responsibilities for each partner agency.
- ❖ Lack of resources which often hinders the timely execution of eradication measures. Such resources include adequate funding, staffing, and materials/supplies.
- ❖ Lack of consistent agency commitment or the prevalence of disruptive political forces.
- ❖ Disruptive personalities such as a lack of leadership skills.
- ❖ Lack of timely action by federal agencies.
- ❖ Failure to act on reports of occurrences of federally-listed weeds.
- ❖ Slow process to place species onto the federal list; and
- ❖ Lack of funds and capacity to control invasive plants on federal lands.
- ❖ Lack of timely action on private and public lands.
- ❖ Lack of local leadership to provide, and when necessary force, access to private lands;
- ❖ Lack of funding for work on private land; and
- ❖ The politics of private property rights and ownership in many communities.
- ❖ Lack of a political constituency (general public/industry/public-interest groups) to support rapid assessment and rapid response actions. [TOP](#)

Opportunities for Improving National and Statewide Coordination. The group was very optimistic about our ability to improve national and statewide coordination to rapidly detect, assessment, and respond to new invasive plants. This is because:

- ❖ Communications are not limiting, particularly with the advent of e-mail, list-serves, and the world-wide web.
- ❖ Managers have access to a wide variety of resources.
- ❖ There are plenty of volunteers with commitment and dedication.
- ❖ Opportunities for cooperation/coordination/education with numerous organizations.
- ❖ There are many underutilized organizations including environmental groups, prison labor and court-directed community service, herbaria, retired citizens, and community volunteers.
- ❖ There are numerous organizations capable of providing political support for local/regional/state efforts, such as Farm Bureau, Cattlemen's Associations, the Nature Conservancy, the Audubon Society, and etc.

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III. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION.

- ❖ *Establish a National Early Warning and Rapid Response Coordinator for Invasive Plants.*
- ❖ *Elevate the Federal Interagency Committee for the Management of Noxious and Exotic Weeds (FICMNEW) to the status that is now held by the Aquatic Nuisance Species (ANS) Task Force.*
- ❖ *Establish Regional Interagency Technical Support Teams under the leadership of the National Early Warning Coordinator to provide on site and distant technical support in weed prevention and eradication projects, including rapid assessments and rapid response activities.*
- ❖ *Utilize the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) as a tool in facilitating rapid assessment and rapid response to new invasive plants.*
- ❖ *Develop a system for emergency herbicide approval for incipient infestations not otherwise covered by existing labels.*
- ❖ *Establish a no-year national contingency fund for use in conducting rapid assessment and rapid response initiatives.*
- ❖ *Establish State Invasive Species Councils, State Weed Teams, and Local Weed Management Areas throughout the country.*
- ❖ *Designate a Statewide Weed Coordinator to facilitate the work of the State Weed Team.*

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Diagram 1. National Level Components of the Proposed Early Warning System.

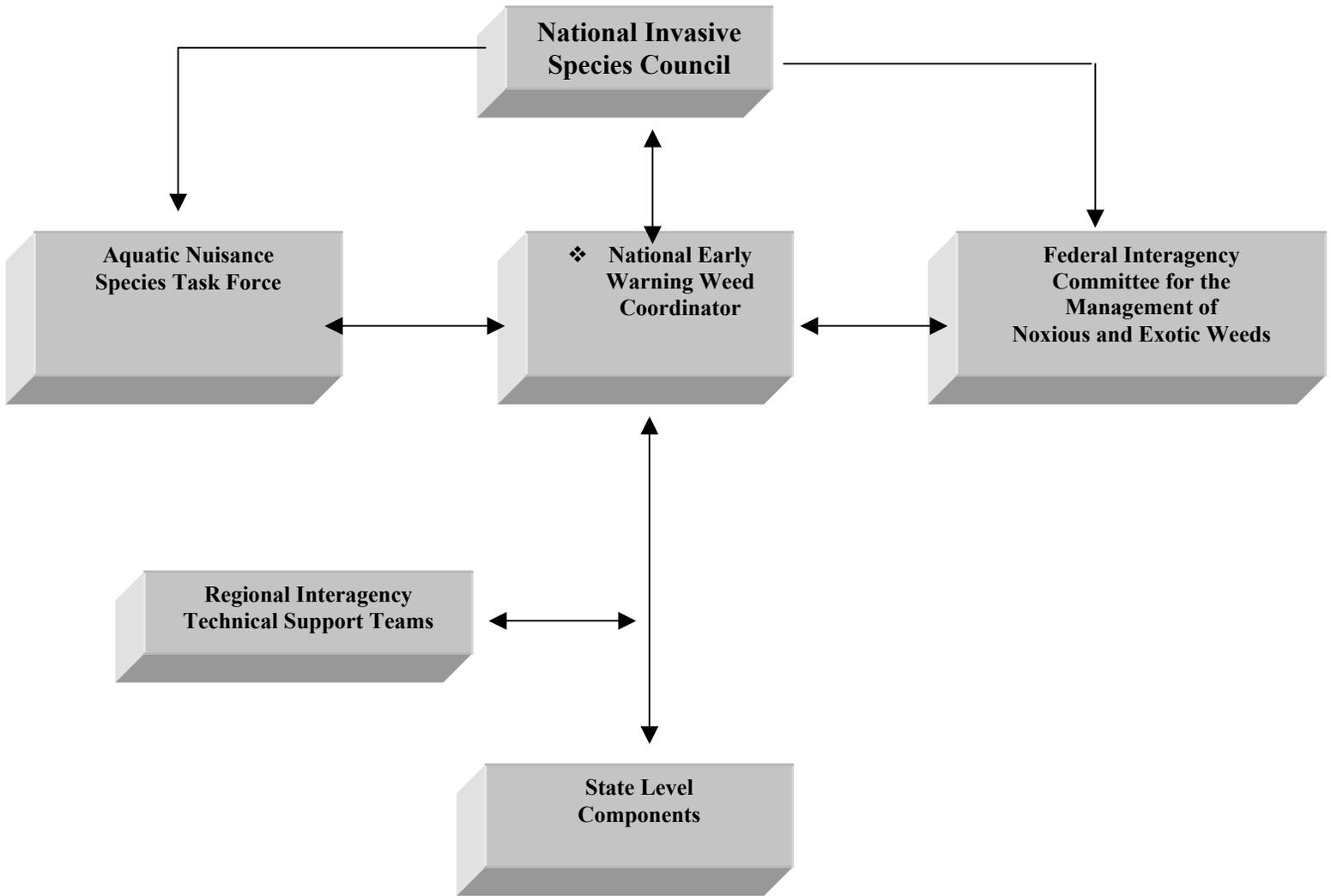
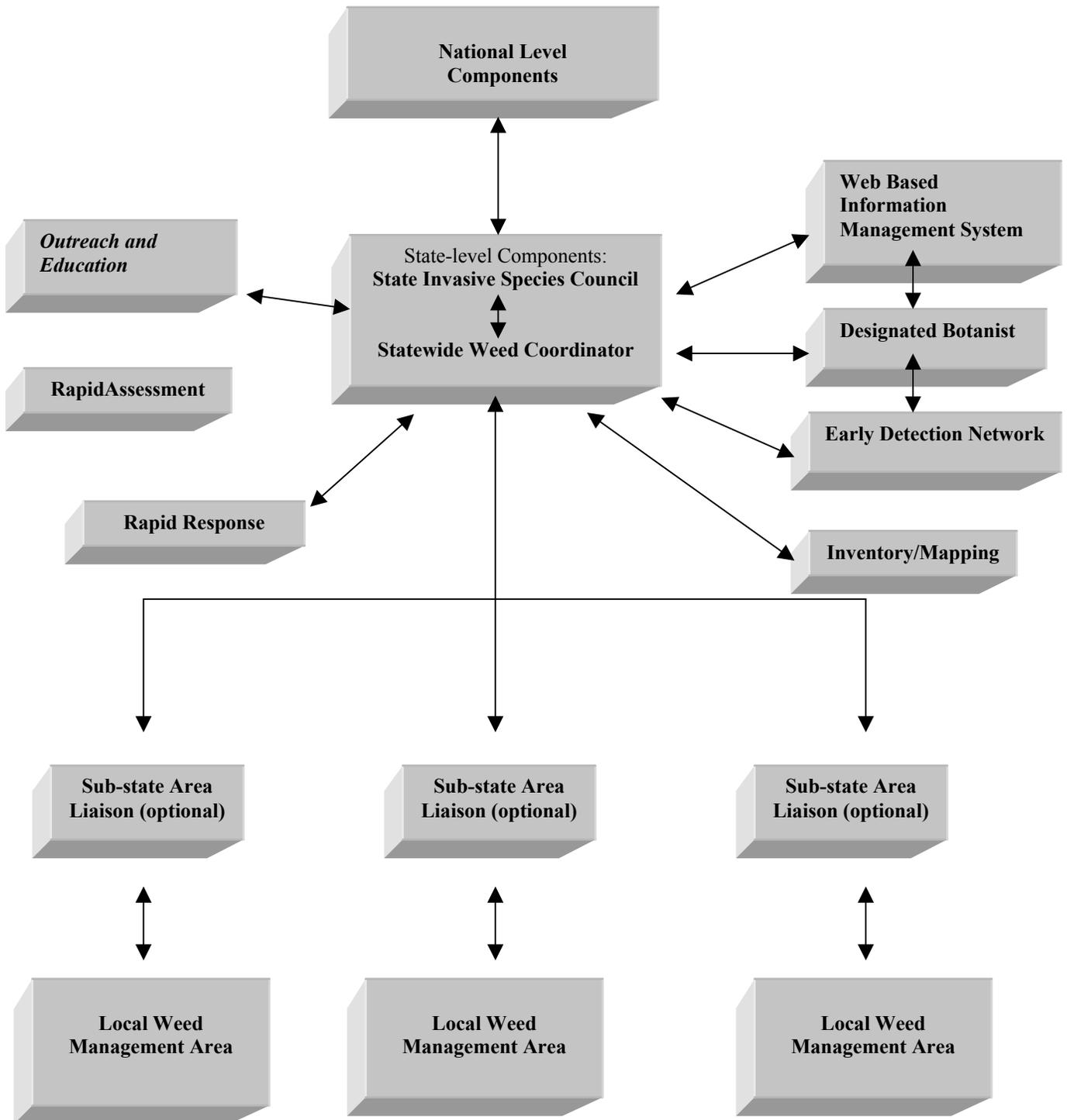


Diagram 2. State and Local Level Components of the National Early Warning System.



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