

Inspection data shows minority of boaters increasing risk to lakes and river

Weekly News Article Published: July 27, 2010 by the [Central Office](#)

Wardens will shift from education to enforcement of new aquatic invasive species law

MADISON – Surveys at boat landings across Wisconsin in summer 2010 show that 96 percent of people say they are following a new law to prevent the spread of Eurasian water-milfoil and other [aquatic invasive species](#). But a few are leaving boat landings with aquatic plants attached, potentially putting scores of lakes and rivers at risk.

From May through late July, 182 people were observed arriving at boat launches with aquatic plants hanging off their boat trailers or boats, or driving away from boat launches at the end of the day with invasive plants attached, according to statewide reports entered through July 25 by boat inspectors and DNR Water Guards. Boat inspectors advise the boaters of the law and how to comply, but they do not have authority to issue warnings or citations. [Survey results](#) are available on the Department of Natural Resources website.

Chief Conservation Warden Randy Stark says that such numbers will spur conservation wardens and Water Guards to shift from educating boaters about the new law, to enforcing it. “Given the extensive media coverage and boater surveys at the landings showing high public awareness of the new law, we’ll begin transitioning to enforcing the law by issuing citations to those individuals who, by not complying, can erase the excellent efforts of the vast majority of boaters.”

The vast majority of Wisconsin’s lakes and rivers are free from the most problematic aquatic invasive species; a case over the July 4th weekend in Vilas County illustrates the threat such waters face from boaters who do not follow laws to prevent spreading aquatic invasive species or fish diseases.

DNR Water Guard John Preuss checked the public launch at pristine Allequash Lake in Vilas County and found a trailer with [Eurasian water milfoil](#) and [zebra mussels](#) hanging from it. When the boater returned to the launch, he told Preuss he was aware of aquatic species law but launched anyway with weeds attached. The man had fished earlier that week in Shawano Lake in Shawano County, which has aquatic invasives including Eurasian water-milfoil, rusty crayfish and zebra mussels. Preuss cited the man for launching a boat in state waters with invasive plants attached, which carries a penalty of \$389.50 for a first time offense.

“The Vilas County AIS Partnership is very happy that (Water Guard) John Preuss chose to visit the landing that day and was vigilant in following through on the incident and issuing a citation,” says Ted Ritter, who coordinates invasive species efforts for Vilas County. He adds that the UW Trout Lake Center for Limnology has agreed to monitor Allequash Lake carefully to see if either zebra mussels or Eurasian water-milfoil get established in the lake from the incident, Ritter says.

Aquatic invasive species officials and public awareness campaigns have stressed to boaters the need to inspect their boats and remove any aquatic plants for the last 15-20 years. It's illegal to launch or leave boat launches and drive on public roads with aquatic plants and animals attached, according to Bob Wakeman, who coordinates aquatic invasive species prevention and control for the DNR.

DNR conservation wardens, Water Guards, and the paid and volunteer watercraft inspectors statewide made a concerted push in the weeks leading up to the Fourth of July holiday, the busiest boating weekend of the year, to educate people about the laws. The effort netted extensive media coverage and wardens and Water Guards statewide issued dozens of warnings to boaters about the transport law, regional warden supervisors reported.

“Awareness of AIS is very high thanks to the efforts of many individuals and groups around the state that see this as a potential threat to the quality of the lakes in the state,” Stark says. “Enforcement of this new law will help support their work, and the good job most boaters are doing to remove aquatic plants and animals from their boats and trailers. We need everybody to do it, however, and hope the enforcement stick can get those last few boaters to comply.”

Lake by lake breakdown on boat inspections available

People can find additional information invasive species and control efforts in a new, user-friendly [aquatic invasives database](#) available on the Department of Natural Resources website. Web users can find statewide statistics, as well as by county. The site provides data on boat inspection efforts, boater compliance and special projects to prevent or control invasive species. The information is displayed in easy to read pie charts and bar graphs, and it's updated every 15 minutes to reflect the reports as they're filed by more than 1,000 boat inspectors, both paid and volunteer, and by DNR Water Guards, according to Jennifer Filbert, who is developing the database and pages.

The site is a work in progress, and more features may be added in coming months, including more information about local projects to prevent or control the spread of aquatic invasive species, and interactive maps.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: Bob Wakeman (262) 574-2149; Greg Stacey (608) 576-9123; Jennifer Filbert, for questions on the database, (608) 264-8533



Department of Natural Resources
101 South Webster Street
Madison, WI 53707

(☎) **phone:** (608) 267-3531
(✉) **e-mail:** Melinda.Wilkinson@wisconsin.gov