

MOST WANTED LIST: Have you seen these aquatic invasive species?

By: Federation of Ontario Cottagers' Associations

Many of us wouldn't recognize an invasive species if it jumped out of the water and landed in our boat. But seriously: silver carp do just that. Up to hundreds at a time may leap when startled by engines. The result makes mesmerizing YouTube footage, but it can mean serious damage to boats and people. Reported injuries have included black eyes, broken bones and concussions.

Recreational boating and transient waterway users are a common source of unintentional introductions of aquatic invasive species. Carp are but one of the invasive species that threaten Ontario's freshwaters. Read this "hit list" of culprits, and then learn what you can do to prevent the spread.

CARP

Asian carp, which are already a problem south of the Canada-USA border, measure up to a metre long, and can weigh 45 kilos! They're ravenous (often eating half of their body weight in one day), they reproduce often, and are difficult to capture. They are now closer than ever to finding their way into the Great Lakes and beyond, to Ontario's inland rivers and lakes.

Some invading species have already entered Ontario, including:

ZEBRA MUSSELS

These freshwater molluscs will cover any hard surface of your dock or boat—to the point of impairing boating efficiency. They have already been spread unintentionally across Ontario waterways. They can cluster on buoys and navigational markers, causing them to sink! Each mussel can produce between 40,000 and 1-million eggs per season, dramatically changing the local ecosystem by consuming huge amounts of plankton. This means less food for prey fish populations which can affect the food chain resulting in fewer large fish like salmon, trout and walleye.

SPINY WATER FLEA

The spiny water flea is small (only around 1 cm long), but is often found in clusters entangled on boat lines and cables, resembling "straight pins" choking the line when it is pulled out of the water. They are voracious feeders that compete with native species of young fish for zooplankton, their food source.

AQUATIC INVASIVE PLANTS

Eurasian watermilfoil is an invasive plant that grows submerged in water to depths of up to 10 metres. It grows aggressively and can spread by seed after long periods of dormancy. It quickly out-competes native plant species, branching out to block sunlight and create thick spreads of stagnant water (the perfect breeding grounds for mosquitoes). Milfoil interferes with fishing and swimming, and can entangle your boat prop.

Another aquatic invader, Carolina fanwort, is still routinely sold in pet stores as an aquarium plant! It has now settled into Ontario lakes where it grows and spreads aggressively, hitching rides on recreational boats to new locations.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

Don't be the person responsible for moving invasive species this season. Follow these simple rules:

- Empty your bait bucket, and drain the water from your bilge and live well before moving to a new waterbody;
- Inspect your boat, trailer and fishing tackle after each use; remove plant debris, wash with hot or high-pressure water and dry thoroughly;
- Don't release live bait, and don't move bait from one waterbody to another. Also, don't use invasive species (such as goby) as bait!

Want to help report invasive species? Join the FOCA Aquatic Invasive Species Monitoring program! Learn more on the FOCA website at www.foca.on.ca/invasive-species/.

You can also visit the Invading Species Awareness Program at www.invadingspecies.com or call the Invasive Species Hotline at 1-800-563-7711.

IMAGE IDEAS:

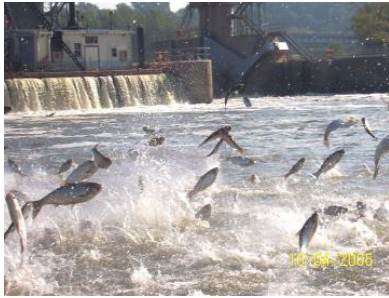


Image: Silver carp at Peoria, photo by Matt Engel, courtesy Great Lakes Fisheries Commission



Carp Explosion, photo by Ted Lawrence, Great Lakes Fisheries Commission



Weeds choking boat motor, OFAH



Zebra Mussel warning sign, photo courtesy FOCA