

Preventing the Spread of Aquatic Invasive Species

By: Federation of Ontario Cottagers' Associations

Recreational boating is one of the true joys of living on or near the water. Having access to Canada's lakes, rivers and waterways allows our families to experience the outdoors in a very special way.

Many stories are emerging from the Great Lakes region about the serious effects of invasive species on fish and aquatic populations. The majority of Canadian species introductions come from discharged ballast water from shipping traffic on the Great Lakes. These hitchhikers can then spread to other waterways by various methods, including recreational boating, water gardens and dumped aquariums.

Invasive species can have devastating effects on the environment around waterfront properties and in our lakes. Unlike native species, alien invasive species tend to have no natural threats to their survival. They move in and can take over ecosystems through rapid reproduction, and by out-competing and/or killing native species. Some of the species that are trying to make their way through our waterways include fish like the round goby, Asian Carp, and invertebrates including the zebra mussel and spiny water flea.

Invasive aquatic plants can cause problems too. The introduction of species like Eurasian Water-Milfoil can dramatically change the quality of boating and other recreational activities. All of these pests have the potential to disrupt natural food webs and can change the very backbone of our precious aquatic ecosystems, and also may pose problems for swimming, boating and fishing. As one example, zebra mussels can clog water intakes and make hard underwater surfaces dangerously sharp. Changing water clarity by filtering algae in the water column, zebra mussels can also aggravate (increase) the growth of aquatic plants.

To prevent the introduction and spread of invasive species, the Federation of Ontario Cottagers' Associations (FOCA) recommends that every boater take precautions.

Because many species can cling to equipment and survive out of the water until they reach the next water body, washing and drying your boat, trailer and related equipment is crucial to stop their movement.

Drain water from the motor, livewell, bilge and transom wells immediately after leaving the water. Dry your boat and equipment in the sun for at least five days before transporting them to another body of water. Alternately, you can rinse your boat and any equipment with hot tap water (greater than 40°C) or spray your boat and trailer with high pressure water (250 psi).

Bait buckets should be emptied on land and never dumped into another water body. Likewise, aquarium contents should not be emptied into our waterways.

Boaters and cottagers should know what invasive species look like and the signs of an invasion. If you find or think you saw an invasive species, you should contact the invading species hotline at 1-800-563-7711. Or, register to use the new online mapping tool called EDDMaps Ontario (Early Detection and Distribution Mapping System). Now you can contribute to tracking and monitoring aquatic invasive species in Ontario waterways! Find more information here: www.foca.on.ca/Invasive_Species

Once introduced to an area, aquatic invasive species are extremely difficult to eradicate. As we enjoy our activities on the water, we all have a stake in minimizing the impacts on these special resources. Preventing the spread of aquatic invasive species is an important consideration for every waterfront property owner.