

DNR ramps up aquatic invasive species inspections

DNR is accelerating its efforts to prevent the spread of zebra mussels and other aquatic invasive species. The DNR will launch its new inspection and decontamination procedures at several large lakes with zebra mussel infestations and high boat traffic.

At the urging of a broad coalition of conservation interests, the Legislature gave the DNR greater authority to inspect and decontaminate boats suspected of harboring aquatic invasive species. It also allocated more money to the DNR for aquatic invasive species prevention.

According to Luke Skinner, DNR aquatic invasive species unit supervisor, "Boaters are still the first line of defense against aquatic invasive species. Now DNR can help ensure their compliance because we can require inspections,

deny launch, order removal of invasives, and require hot-water flushing and high-pressure washing."

The DNR recently trained 17 invasive species staff to implement the new inspection authorities and operate three newly purchased decontamination (boat washing) units. The portable decontamination units are capable of spraying 160-degree water at high pressure. The equipment will be used to remove zebra mussels from boat hulls and treat livewells and other areas that can harbor invasive species.

DNR has already trained conservation officers to enforce new regulations. The agency will train additional inspection staff during the remainder of the summer.

"We are focused on implementing the new inspection procedures and

understanding how to use the new decontamination equipment safely and efficiently," said Steve Hirsch, DNR Ecological and Water Resources director. "We ask that boaters are patient with the new inspection process. If boaters are well prepared when they enter and leave the water, the new inspection process should go smoothly."

With new funds from the Legislature, the DNR was able to increase funding for its aquatic invasive species inspection program from \$1 million annually to \$1.9 million annually. The increase will pay for additional inspectors and includes \$300,000 for decontamination equipment. The DNR plans to increase the number of decontamination units from three to a fleet of 20 or more by summer of 2012.

For the next few weeks,



the DNR will focus its new inspection and decontamination procedures on lakes that are infested with zebra mussels and have high boat traffic, such as Minnetonka, Mille Lacs, and Pelican Lake (in Otter Tail County). The portable decontamination units will be used at access sites around the state.

"The majority of boats won't need to be decontaminated with a hot-water, high-pressure wash," Skinner said. "Only boats that don't pass an inspection will need to be decontaminated with the new equipment, and we suspect there won't

be too many of them on any given day."

The DNR encourages boaters to follow a few simple steps before leaving a water access to help the new inspection and decontamination process go smoothly:

1. Leave a little extra time in your recreational schedule for the new inspection process
2. Remove visible aquatic plants and zebra mussels from boats and trailers
3. Drain water from your boat, livewell, bilge, and impellor by removing drain plugs and opening water

draining devices

4. Drain portable bait containers

5. Remember: aquatic invasive species are a serious threat to Minnesota's lakes, streams, and wetlands, and YOU are the first best prevention strategy

The DNR website has additional information on aquatic invasive species and on the new inspection and decontamination equipment. Go to www.dnr.state.mn.us to watch a video presentation on the new inspection and decontamination procedures.