



WHAT CAN WE DO TO PREVENT INVASIVE PLANTS?

Here are some things that can be done locally to prevent the introduction and spread of invasive aquatic species, in particular exotic plants. There are also a few notes about what cannot or should not be done.

The first thing to understand is that the threat of invasive aquatic species is not going to go away at any time in the foreseeable future. As long as people travel from one waterbody to another, the potential for the spread of unwanted aquatic organisms will persist. For any prevention effort to be effective it must be sustainable “over the long haul.” It is important, therefore, to choose the strategies that are most suited to the particular circumstances and needs of your community, and that can be adapted over time. The best way to do this is to organize a committee, with members representing a broad spectrum of community interests, to collect information and develop a comprehensive plan for addressing the invasives issue locally.

Many of the most effective strategies are very simple and inexpensive. Others will require more time, effort and funding. Volunteers can do much of the work, but there may be instances when the assistance of professionals may be warranted. For each project, there should be a designated individual who takes on the job of monitoring things over time, e.g., checking periodically that signs are still up, brochures are still being given out, etc.

1. Make sure that all public launch ramps have warning signs

Use the signs developed by the VLMP and the DEP or make your own. Whichever you choose, remember that visual clutter can be an issue. Think about placement to increase the likelihood that boaters will actually see the signs. When placing signs, make sure to identify who owns the ramp and talk with them about sign placement etc.

Kiosks at landings are a good way to offer more information, but again, the best information is not useful if it is not seen. Sometimes the shorter, simpler, and more attention-getting the message is, the more effect it has. Be sure to avoid alarmist rhetoric – that turns many people off.

2. Post informational posters and flyers

Look for key areas in your community where boaters (especially those from away) are likely to see public notices, such as community bulletin boards, local stores, sportsmen's clubs, etc. Post the VLMP flyer material, both sides of the color brochure, or develop your own posters and flyers. The use of color and keeping the message simple increases the chances that the information will be read. (Electronic files of the VLMP brochure graphics are available upon request. Also, please feel free to take illustrations off our website.)

3. Ask your town office to hand out brochures

Contact your town office and ask if they will hand out brochures (your own brochure and/or those developed by the DEP, VLMP or others) whenever boat and boat trailers are registered and when fishing licenses or the new “Protect Maine Waters” boat stickers are purchased. Non-resident fishing licenses and the boat stickers are also sold through local stores and agents, so they should be contacted as well.

Be sure to ask stores, tourist information locations, town offices etc. to put up posters (in effective locations) and stock brochures.

4. Distribute flyers and/or brochures at ramps

- a) Organize volunteers to stop by public boat ramps a few times each day and place flyers on vehicles with trailers. To reduce the chances of “reflyering” frequent ramp users, keep records of which vehicles have been “flyered” and avoid repeats when possible.
- b) Put flyers in a box at the ramp for people to pick up.

One problem with both of the above mentioned methods of distributing flyers is the potential for litter, so be prepared to pick up a few flyers from time to time. As with placing signs, it's good to discuss the project with the ramp owner before hand.

5. Create a portable display of posters, signs and brochures

A portable display can be a terrific way to reach a wide audience. Move the display around the community – place it in schools and libraries, or set it up at public meetings and events, etc.

6. Inventory all places where boats are launched and contact the owners

Keep a list of who has ramps likely to be used by boats from other lakes, including the contact person and when last contacted. It's good to renew these contacts in May and July each year.

- a) Private ramps open to others (such as marinas and sporting camps): When someone launches at a commercial facility, the staff there can use the opportunity to hand out brochures and may be willing to check boat trailers for plants. If you get this kind of cooperation, please make sure to acknowledge the owner and staff in your newsletter or newspaper article. The owner can also post a sign/poster for you.
- b) Other private ramps: Alert owners to potential problems. If they have guests use their boat launch, ask them to check the boat before launching.

7. Boat inspection at ramps

Having boat inspectors at ramps is perhaps the single most effective way to prevent the spread of invasive plants. It is imperative that the owner of the ramp (IF&W, DOC, Town, Sporting Club, etc.) knows and agrees with what you are doing. Above all, avoid conflicts with boaters by observing a few simple rules:

- a) Boater participation in your inspections is completely voluntary. View it as an opportunity to educate them. If they object to an inspection, or are “too busy”, simply offer them a brochure.
- b) Try to talk with boaters before launch; preferably while they are preparing their boat, and not while it is on the ramp if the facility is busy.
- c) Keep your message short. Boaters are often impatient to be off, and they will be more receptive to a few sentences (and maybe let you quickly show them the inspection process) if you are brief.

d) Never “expect” boaters to accept your message. Some people are very sensitive to implications that they should do things differently. If they are resistant or show signs of wanting to argue, it is best to thank them for their time and let them continue on their way.

You may want a mixture of volunteer help and paid interns, depending on your resources and the amount of time you think you can arrange for coverage at the landing. Obviously, you want to cover the highest use times -- weekends, vacation times (Memorial Day, July 4th), fishing tournaments, etc.

Lakes Environmental Association (LEA) offers boat inspection training for volunteer groups. Please contact LEA at 207-647-8580 or lakes@leamaine.org for more information.

8. Boat Washing Stations

Boat washing stations can be effective, but are generally quite costly to set up and operate. They may not be much more effective than careful inspections at preventing plant infestations. However, zebra mussels may be transported in engine cooling water and any container with lake water from another area. If an engine has not been flushed out with clean water before launching, at least run it “dry” for a few seconds so most of the cooling water will be expelled, preferably away from the ramp so it soaks into the ground. A few seconds should do it, and will not overheat the engine. Some boat owners will not agree to that. A better alternative would be to have a “boot” and clean water source for flushing the cooling system completely.

9. Incentives to cooperate

Getting people to cooperate can be helped if something useful comes along with the education (key chain, water bottle, etc.). This can also carry your message: association logo or whatever take-home message you want.

10. Survey the ramp area and other likely sites for invasive plants

The VLMP offers Invasive Plant Patrol training to help volunteers in your community conduct invasive plant surveys of lakes, ponds or streams. Please contact the VLMP for upcoming workshop dates and locations.

11. Using local media to put out the word

Many areas have free advertisers or seasonal papers that will print short articles if you provide the information and especially a selection of clear pictures or graphics. The papers are often looking for content, and reviewing a few past issues will give you an idea for length, style etc. of what they may print.

The message might vary depending on the time of year and the project you choose. While you want to avoid sensational statements, your story should be presented in a way that will be of interest to the public. Any time you can put your issue in a local perspective, especially how the issue affects people, it makes for a better read. Some of these papers will print articles for you several times a year, particularly if you offer something a bit different each time. Media exposure works best if the message is short, positive and repeated in different ways.

Explore other outlets such as newsletters from organizations (besides lake associations) that make regular mailings and may be receptive to including your information. These can include local service groups, churches or clubs.

Some other things you should know:

State law, or other considerations may limit what can or should be done in some instances.

Restricting Public Access: Unless the Town or private club etc. owns a launch ramp and has the right to close it, it will not be possible to close the lake to boats and gear coming “from away”. Campaigns to do this can cause bad feelings among local people who rely on these access points to use lakes.

Restricting Surface Use (such as allowing only non-motorized craft): Only IF&W can set restrictions on surface use, such as maximum horsepower and the like, and they are limited by law as to what they can limit (horsepower size, use by personal watercraft) and for what reasons (public safety). There is a process to restrict surface use by petition for these reasons, but limitations apply to everyone using the lake (including camp owners). In the case of restricting personal watercraft, it also requires municipalities involved to agree to identical standards. For more information, call IF&W at 207-287-8000 or see their website at http://www.maine.gov/ifw/laws_rules/boatlaws.htm.

Use of Herbicides: Except in private ponds with no outlets, herbicide application to water requires a discharge permit from the DEP and in many cases, application by a licensed pesticide applicator. Pesticides themselves and professional applicators are regulated by the Department of Agriculture, Pesticides Control Board. For more information, please call 207-287-2731 or check the web at www.maine.gov/agriculture/pesticides/index.htm

Discharge licenses for pesticides to lakes are not allowed by DEP: Under current law, DEP can apply herbicides for the sole purpose of restoring a water body. Repeated applications or the use of herbicides to simply suppress or manage, but not eliminate a plant population is not allowed.

There is growing anecdotal evidence that property owners are buying herbicides from local suppliers, through the mail, or over the Internet and using them illegally in lakes. Herbicides have been used on native populations of plants to eliminate them in front of camps. People may have the misimpression that because the chemicals are EPA registered, they are safe and benign. The suppliers rarely tell a person that applying them without proper permission is a serious legal offense and is hazardous to the environment (and to themselves if not done properly).

Physical Control Methods: Methods such as dredging, bottom barriers and weed harvesting require an “NRPA” permit. DEP can apply control methods without getting a permit provided it is for the *immediate eradication* of an infestation. If such physical control methods are to be done by parties other than the DEP or for management/suppression (without the prospect of eradication) then a regular NRPA permit is required.

Homeowners are allowed to *hand-remove* a swath of vegetation 10 feet wide perpendicular from their shoreline out into the lake. This will allow a place to swim and passage for boats. To do this, an owner needs to get a “Permit by Rule” from the DEP. Although a quick and simple process, PBR carries clear standards, which must be met. For information on NRPA and PBR standards, call a DEP agent at 207-287-3901 or 1-800-452-1942 or visit the web: <http://www.maine.gov/dep/land/nrpa/index.html>.