

Piers & Places

Preventing the Spread

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You finally pulled it off! The first annual 3rd Grade fishing extravaganza in your schools history!

You jumped through all the hoops of the school board, you got the parents on board to help out, you got 98% of the field trip permission slips returned (a new personal record) and you even remembered to pick up the bait.


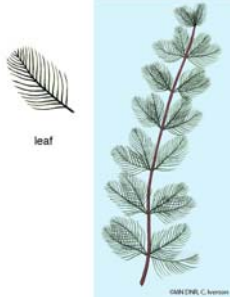


The bus was on time, the weather was perfect and a local reporter even stopped by the snap a few photos of the kids

catching some spring crappies. Congratulations!!

As the day wrapped up, you remembered your minnow bucket and the left over worms. Now you could go home to your own dock on your lake home, kick up your feet and try a bit of peaceful fishing yourself.

First things first when you get home though, you get those minnows back into the water. Completely forgetting that the lake you just came from had zebra mussels, Eurasian water milfoil and spiny water flea!! The lake association probably won't figure out who's to blame when your lake becomes infested with these aquatic invasive species, right? At least you had the good sense not to dump the night crawlers in the State Forest that runs along the back of your property...right? Right??

Aquatic Invasive Species

			
zebra mussel	Eurasian water milfoil	spiny water flea	round goby

It's just that easy. **Invasive species** are a huge threat to Minnesota's aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems.

Invasive plant and animal species have caused severe habitat alteration and degradation, competition with native species, and a major loss of biological diversity throughout the world. *Did you know that northern pike are a major problem in California and that largemouth bass are causing huge problems in China?*

Invasive species populations can often explode allowing them to disrupt native plant communities and crowd out native species. They can cause problems for those who use natural resources, whether for recreational use of land or waters or industrial use of public waters. Once established, invasive species rarely can be eliminated.

Minnesota anglers play a critical role in making sure we don't give them a hand in spreading around the state. Those of us that introduce youth to angling have an even higher calling to model good

stewardship behaviors during our events or field trips.

Here are some steps that every angler must do.

- Inspect all watercraft, trailers, and water-related equipment; remove any visible aquatic plants, zebra mussels, and other prohibited invasive species before leaving any water access.
- **Tip for Educators:** Inspect all the equipment you used at the water's edge and in the water; remove any visible aquatic plants, zebra mussels, and other prohibited invasive species before leaving any water access, shoreline or pier.
- Drain water from boat, livewell, bilge, impellor, bait containers and other equipment holding water before leaving any water access. If you want to keep your live bait after draining bait containers, you must replace water in bait containers with tap or spring water.
- **Tip for Educators:** Drain water from any containers including bait containers and other materials holding water before leaving the fishing area.
- Dispose of unwanted bait in the trash. It is illegal to release live bait into a waterbody or release aquatic animals from one waterbody into another.
- **Tip for Educators:** It is possible to keep worms/nightcrawler in the refrigerator for extended periods of time between fishing outings.

There are a few other good behaviors that will help reduce spreading these species:

- Shore and fly-fishing: Remove aquatic plants, animals, and mud from waders and hip boots. Drain water from bait containers.
- **Tip for Educators:** Bring a scrub brush and wash pan with you so that students can remove mud, seeds and other hitchhikers from their shoes before leaving the site. Lake/river/stream water onsite can be used for this purpose.
- Rinse your boat and boating equipment with hot tap water (over 120° F); or spray your boat and trailer with a high-pressure sprayer. (The hot water sprayers at a car wash can be used); or Dry your boat and equipment for at least 5 days.
- **Tip for Educators:** Drying out fishing rod/reel combos for 5 days or more will allow for any water/plants/organisms inside the reel housing to die. Do not rinse hot water through the reel housing since this will flush out the gear lubricants. However, opening the reel cover and brushing out materials with a brush is a good practice.
- Report new sightings of aquatic invasive species. If you suspect a new infestation of an invasive plant or animal, save a specimen and report it to a local natural resource office.
- **Tip for Educators:** Reporting new sightings or infestations can be an excellent learning experience for youth. Mentoring this good stewardship behavior through a group activity will return dividends for future generations.

Before you head out with your classroom or youth group, there are a couple good lessons from the **Fishing: Get in the Habitat!** leader's guide that will help the kids understand why its important to stop the spread and how they can easily be responsible for making sure aquatic invasives don't get a helping hand.

Lesson 3:7 - Mussel Mania^{PDF} (25 pages | 2.6 MB), our **Featured Lesson**, will help your students understand how aquatic invasive species out compete native species and can drive them to extinction in a local lake or river.

Lesson 6:3 - Planning a Fishing Trip^{PDF} (19 pages | 2.4 MB), gives students an opportunity to use the **MN DNR LakeFinder** to learn more about the lake they are going to visit and if that lake has any established invasive species populations that you need to be aware of on your trip.

It only takes a few moments to change a lake forever, it also only takes a few moments to follow best practices to make sure it doesn't happen.