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DNR officials concerned about transport of zebra mussels from infested waters when boat lifts, docks are moved *Discovery of mussels on Lake Irene boat lift may represent a trend*

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) biologists fear they might be seeing a disturbing trend of zebra mussels hitchhiking on boat lifts that are moved from infested waters to uninfested lakes. The second such case was discovered this week on the northeast corner of Lake Irene in Douglas County, where a localized population of zebra mussels was discovered on a lift last weekend.

A similar case was discovered at Rose Lake in Otter Tail County Sept. 28.

DNR staff members were called to property on Lake Irene Oct. 8 to investigate the presence of zebra mussels on a boat lift that had recently been removed from the water. They suspect the zebra mussels were transported to the lake this summer when the boat lift was moved in from an infested lake.

"Moving docks and boat lifts from zebra mussel infested lakes to other lakes is a serious issue," said Nathan Olson, DNR invasive species specialist in Fergus Falls. "We can't stress enough that everyone needs to take extra precautions to avoid transporting these pests to other state waters."

An inspection revealed clusters of mussels on the feet and inside the tubing of the boat lift. No additional zebra mussels were found after inspections of 74 additional Lake Irene boat lifts and docks near the infected boat lift.

The next day a diver searched the bottom of the lake where the boat lift was located and found zebra mussels attached to rocks. The mussels were found only in the immediate area where the boat lift was located.

The DNR plans to treat the small area with copper sulfate, a common chemical used to treat snails that cause swimmers itch. The treatment could be conducted by a licensed aquatic pesticide contractor early next week.

"As with Rose Lake in Otter Tail County, we are hoping that early detection and rapid response to the zebra mussel discovery might prevent an infestation," said Olson. "We won't know for sure if treatment is successful until next summer."

The DNR will designate Lake Irene as an infested water body. This designation adds additional restrictions for the transport of water from the lake and prohibits bait harvest on the lake. It also means there will be increased enforcement and watercraft inspections efforts in this area.

This will be the seventh lake the DNR has designated as infested with zebra mussels in 2011.

The introduction of the zebra mussels into Lake Irene and Rose Lake is being investigated by area DNR conservation officers. It is illegal to possess, import, purchase, sell, propagate, transport or introduce invasive species into Minnesota waters. Violators can receive civil and criminal penalties.

Boat lifts and docks are of particular concern because they sit in the water for extended periods, giving adult zebra mussels a greater opportunity to attach themselves.

"We strongly recommend that all water-related equipment be cleaned thoroughly by pressure washing with hot water and dried for a minimum of two weeks before putting the equipment into a body of water," Olson said. "It's imperative that people act responsibly to slow the spread of aquatic invasive species."

More information about aquatic invasive species is available on DNR website at: www.mndnr.gov/invasives.

This article appeared in a recent edition of the Park Rapids Enterprise. It is a very well done summary of the presentation that we made to the Nevis City Council. We thank them for the support. –Ken Grob

Nevis agrees to partner with task force to combat spread of AIS on Belle Taine

Jean Ruzicka - 03/17/2012

Funding to address preventing the infestation of zebra mussels in Belle Taine moved from a “we’ll consider this for next year’s budget” comment to a \$500 donation this week after Nevis Council members were advised of the gravity of the issue. Ken Grob, Aquatic Invasive Species Task Force chair, urged partnerships among cities and townships to combat “the real threat and danger to Hubbard County’s lakes, rivers and watersheds. “We can’t do it alone,” he said of partnering with communities. “Our lakes need your help.” Fishing guides Jason Durham and Kelley Cirks urged the city’s involvement. “It’s best to get it done before it happens,” Cirks said. “I was on Lake Erie when it started. It devastated it.” “Nevis,” he pointed out, “is built on Belle Taine.” “It’s a battle,” Durham agreed. “You can see it on the map.”

Zebra mussels have spread across the eastern half of the U.S. at an incredible rate, Grob pointed out in his presentation. They were first discovered in 1988 in Lake St. Clair, which connects with Lake Huron and Lake Erie. Two years later they spread to all the Great Lakes. By 1995, they were found in most major river systems in the East. AIS is not only a threat to county lakes, but to the tax base, Grob said. “AIS can lead to a 15 to 30 percent reduction in property values in lakes impacted by zebra mussels,” he said. Lake Belle is a “big part of Nevis,” he said of the fishing tournaments, Northwoods Triathlon, resorts and campgrounds. The lake’s taxable market value, at \$133 million-plus, is second in the county. (Long Lake is the first.) Water clarity is an enviable 21 feet. “The Mantrap Chain is one of the clearest and cleanest in the state,” he said. Zebra mussels are small freshwater mollusks that spread rapidly, reaching high densities. There is no known full-lake method of control or containment.

The mussels secrete a powerful glue, enabling them to form dense colonies on rocks, metal, plastic, concrete, pipes, boats and other submerged objects. The lake, Grob stressed, is changed forever. Beaches are ruined. Fish populations decline dramatically. Hubbard County lakes are at a risk for zebra mussel infestation. To date, zebra mussels have been found in about 90 Minnesota lakes, rivers and wetlands. The infestation in Lake Mille Lacs grew to “off the charts” proportions from 2008 to 2011. “Leech Lake is the predominant next fishing destination for boaters leaving Mille Lacs, based on a 2010 DNR survey. Hubbard County is home to four major watersheds – the Mantrap Chain, Fish Hook River Chain, Crow Wing River Chain and Long Lake. An infestation could affect nearly every major lake, Grob said. This would likely cause a significant tax revenue gap, he said. A Wisconsin study showed a 13 percent reduction of property values on lakes with Eurasian milfoil. “Zebra mussels will be more,” he predicts. “Watercraft inspection is the name of the game,” he said. Treatment of infestation is \$500-plus per acre. Grob indicated two levels of inspection can be employed. The first level is educating the boat owner and suggesting decontamination. Law enforcement would be called if necessary. With the second level, the inspector would have the authority to go into the boat, look in live wells and deny launch, if necessary.

Focus areas of prevention in the season ahead are:

- Increased watercraft inspections on high-risk lakes;
- Substantial increase in lake monitoring and volunteer inspections (60 are currently trained);
- Additional lake association funding for inspections;
- Seeking grants for public awareness and inspection;
- Ensuring lake service providers are certified;
- Engaging campground and resort owners to participate in watercraft inspection, and
- Outreach – to promote, communicate and educate. Dick Boehmer, Belle Taine AIS Task Force member provided the council with a list of “proactive” plans for the summer ahead. These include water testing and inspections of watercraft, expanded solicitation of lake association membership, establishing a permanent AIS fund and applying for grants.