Summertime Fun . . . or is it?

Aquatic Invasive Species and their Effect on Recreation

Summertime is upon us and with this season comes those memorable activities focused around water—boating, fishing, waterskiing, swimming, jet skiing, tubing, canoeing, kayaking, or those leisurely evening pontoon trips puttering around a lake. We in northern Wisconsin are fortunate to have these water resources and all these fun activities so accessible. However, there is something that threatens the water activities we love and appreciate—aquatic invasive species (AIS). The key word describing this group of species is "aquatic." If the species lives under water, its harmful effects may go unnoticed for awhile, unlike some invasive plant or insect on the land that is readily obvious. Aquatic invasive plants grow earlier in the spring giving them a head start, and then grab all the sunlight and resources available resulting in an explosion of growth. What was once a deep (15 ft) musky bay in the spring can become an Eurasian water-milfoil (EWM)-choked bay by midsummer. If the water is clear, EWM can grow in 30 feet of water from the lake bed to the surface annoyingly impeding any boating or swimming in the vegetation-thick water. Curly-leaf pondweed can do the same thing as well as many more aquatic submersed and floating invasive species that have yet to be transported to our waters. The old adage of 'an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure' is THE guiding principle to combat the AIS threat. The prevention steps are to inspect, clean, and dry equipment after taking it out of the water. Drain all water from equipment as it can harbor microscopic organisms. And never release organisms into a water body that did not come from that water body. The state financially assists many local programs where watercraft inspector/educators are at boat launches instructing and helping boaters with those simple prevention steps. Keeping these species out of water bodies is the ultimate goal. Established populations of AIS like zebra mussels, rusty crayfish, and spiny water fleas can change the lake ecosystem negatively influencing all the inhabitants of that lake. Game fish populations, as the top predators, can be the greatest affected. It goes without saying how important this group of animals is to the local and regional economies and to the recreation pleasure of so many in the state. Think about it. How many of your fond memories are attached to summer water activities? Make those simple AIS prevention steps a part of your summertime routine. Our grandkids will thank us for it!