



MANITOWOC COUNTY LAKES ASSOCIATION

The Manitowoc County Lakes Association will protect and enhance the quality of area lakes and watersheds for the benefit of all.

DATE: NOVEMBER 4, 2009

SUBJECT: FINAL REPORT FOR THE MANITOWOC "STOP HITCHHIKERS" CAMPAIGN
AEPP-184-09

FROM: TOM WARD, MCLA AIS COORDINATOR

Final report for the Billboard grant developed by Calumet County and Manitowoc County Lakes Association, grant period of October 1, 2008 though December 31, 2009. The project accomplished the sponsorship of three area Billboards featuring the Stop Aquatic Hitchhikers Campaign.

The utilization of Billboards met the goal of the Calumet and Manitowoc County AIS projects as another dimension to an educational mission reminding boaters to inspect, clean and drain their boats at all boat launches. Year 2008 was the initial year of the Manitowoc County AIS project and overall knowledge of AIS issues was very limited in this region. Boat inspections conducted by volunteers were also limited in Manitowoc County prior to the start of the project. Boaters targeted by MCLA's Aquatic Invasive Species Project (AIS) are frequent users of County's inland lakes. Identifying that a large number of this target audience has not been exposed to the States AIS initiatives as in Northern Wisconsin's AIS projects or the Winnebago Lake Systems boat inspection projects; the partners felt it was important to increase general awareness of the Clean Boat Inspection Program.

The original proposal included funding for two Billboards. Through competitive pricing and careful negotiations, the project was able to purchase three Billboards, two of which were illuminated.

One billboard was located on US Hwy 10 at Brillion in Calumet County. This main artery sees boaters traveling from the harbors of Two Rivers and Manitowoc (known to have Quagga mussels, Spiny Water Fleas and Round Gobies), to Lake Winnebago and other inland lakes to the West. This highly visible sign was situated next to Ariens Lawn Equipment Manufacturer (employing over 1,000 people); across the road from the Brillion High School (450 students plus teachers and parents); adjacent to the local Catholic Church (with over 900 parishioners); Endries Mfg. down the street (employing over 500 workers) and Brillion Iron Works (employing some 250 workers) all living in the area.

A second billboard was located on US Hwy 151 near Valders targeting boaters traveling between inland lakes concentrated in the southern region of Manitowoc and Calumet counties and Lake Michigan.

The third billboard was located on Hwy 42 to reach boaters traveling between the lakes south of Manitowoc and Silver Lake (a lake that has had over one million dollars invested during various restorations).

Project partners: MCLA would like to thank and acknowledge our partners who helped by providing funding for the billboard project:

- The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources;
- Manitowoc County Fish & Game Protective Association;
- Winnebago Lakes Council;
- The Friends of High Cliff State Park;
- Calumet County Invasive Species Project.

A special thank you goes out to Diane Schauer, AIS Coordinator for Calumet County, for the development of the proposal, grant application and some new partners for this project. The commitment for this project by the local organizations was important during the startup of the MCLA AIS program and local acceptance of our initiative.

Public Informational Campaign: Billboard images were utilized in multiple mailings such as the MCLA newsletter (sent to over 900 riparian Lake Owners), the Winnebago Lakes Council newsletter, placed on displays and articles announcing the Billboard Campaign and was published in various press publications including: Brillion News, Valdres Journal, Kiel Tri-County Record, Lakeshore Chronicle and the Herald Times Reporter and Wisconsin Outdoors from New London.

Summary of Boat inspection data: The primary objective of the Bill Board campaign was to kick start awareness of AIS. SWIMS data at the end of the boat inspection season identified that 65% of our boaters were not aware of the AIS law compared to 9% for the State average. This substantiated our theory that on this part of the State invasive species knowledge was limited.

When Boaters were asked what their source of information was from, 11% noted Billboards compared to the State average of 3%. However 36% stated signs as their source of information which could have meant Bill Boards. As the summer progressed volunteer and the paid boat inspector did not specifically ask about Billboards as a source of information reducing our response rate.

Data from counties conducting inspections on Lake Winnebago and from the 2007 Manitowoc pre-project period indicated that boaters frequenting the larger lakes had a higher knowledge level of AIS law, often times 90%. Vs. the 2009 level of 35% who were primarily boaters on the inland lakes.

Project Summary: The question in everyone's mind is, are Billboards effective? Comments received by Diane Schauer, Tom Ward and others were coming from Librarians, area boaters, County Fair attendees, friends, and MCLA members, and identified that the Billboards were quite noticeable and easily readable. I even had a person ask, how were hitchhikers jumping into boats exactly? Because of the unfamiliarity with invasive species in this area, some basic awareness was critical and long overdue.

With the hiring of a part-time boat inspector this past season, it was important to combine the awareness mechanism of the Billboards and follow-through with active boat inspection procedures at area boat landings. The partnership with area Fish & Game organizations was also valuable. It was my experience that many of the club members were aware of the need to implement a Clean Boats procedure, but they were skeptical about the overall effectiveness of an AIS prevention program. The holistic approach of actions through boat inspections, media, displays and presentations, the idea of AIS prevention was more readily acceptable in the Sportsman community.

Diane and I believe that in this target area where AIS awareness has just started the development of a large-scale illustration, I. E. the size of a Billboard, was an effective educational tool worthy of such an investment.