
Boats leaving the water with weeds in tow are easily inspected. Finding less obvious weeds requires a thorough inspection to comply with the state's aquatic nuisance species regulations.



ANS Prevention Continues

By Craig Bihrl

To prevent introduction or spread of aquatic nuisance species, the key is to follow the same procedures whether or not an ANS is present.

It works like this: Someone who knows an ANS like Eurasian water milfoil is present is likely to make a thorough effort to clean off a boat and trailer before leaving a lake or river. If there is no evidence of a problem, the prevention process may not be so thorough or even done.

Last year, North Dakota adopted new regulations designed to bring consistency to ANS prevention by all – anglers, boaters and hunters. Instead of *recommendations* for removing aquatic plants from watercraft and trailers, the state now has laws that emphasize the importance of keeping ANS out of the state.

“We need to use the same prevention, whether we know ANS is there, or if we don’t know,” says Lynn Schlueter, the North Dakota Game and Fish Department’s aquatic nuisance species coordinator.

As a refresher, the primary new rules are:

- Remove all aquatic plants from boats, trailers and other equipment, including fishing rods, lures, etc., when leaving a water body.

- Drain all water from boats and other watercraft after leaving a water body. Anglers may, however, maintain water in a livewell or bait container if they are transporting fish or live baitfish. You cannot, however, cross state lines, either from North Dakota to another state, or from another state to North Dakota, with any water in boats, bait buckets or other watercraft.

A couple of strands of unknown weeds wedged between boat and trailer, or floating in bilge water, may not seem like much, but Schlueter says it doesn’t take much to move ANS to a new venue. It’s important to realize, he added, that it only takes a fragment or two of the two primary ANS plants already in the state – curly leaf pondweed and Eurasian water milfoil – to start a new infestation. The same goes for ANS that do not exist in North Dakota.

In addition, that consistent vigilance is necessary because ANS may become well established in a lake before it is noticed. People may already have inadvertently moved it to other areas before it is discovered.

Last year, Game and Fish Department efforts

emphasized education. Fisheries and enforcement personnel set up a few road checks, but mostly did random inspections at ramps, making sure that boaters were aware of the new laws and pointing out potential violations.

“Most people were aware of it ... the boats were relatively clean,” Schlueter said, “but there were a few individuals who hadn’t really understood and had not taken prevention to heart.”

This year, education efforts will continue, in addition to increased checkpoints and potential enforcement action.

The Search Goes On

In addition to the prevention message, Game and Fish biologists are also monitoring known ANS infestations, as well as looking for new problems or expansions in likely areas.

Last summer, curly leaf pondweed was discovered in the McClusky Canal downstream from Lake Audubon in McLean County. While curly leaf is well established in Audubon, the discovery was far enough down the canal that it’s hard to determine whether the plant wound up there naturally, or whether a boater might have moved it.

The state has two known infestations of Eurasian water milfoil. One is in the Sheyenne River near Valley City. This area was chemically treated in fall 2007 to try to eliminate the milfoil, but the hardy plant came back. This past summer a new colony was discovered upstream of the Valley City National Fish Hatchery, expanding the infestation to about four miles of river.

Fortunately, milfoil has not yet been discovered in the Sheyenne River downstream of Valley City.

Eurasian milfoil is also present in Dead Colt Creek Reservoir near Lisbon in Ransom County. Milfoil was identified there in 2005. The reservoir water level was lowered substantially late that fall in an effort to expose the milfoil to air and freezing temperatures, which can kill the plants.

The effort, while it knocked the milfoil back significantly for a time, was not 100 percent successful. In 2009 the milfoil is mostly re-established.

These two milfoil pockets are prime examples of why preventing ANS from establishing in the first place is a Game and Fish Department priority. Even if attempts to eliminate them – often costing thousands of dollars even on small waters – are 99 percent successful, the plant or animal may eventually come back.

In addition to monitoring ANS plants, the Department continues to search for aquatic animals that are potential candidates for eventually making their way into the state. Schlueter says biologists collect water from many lakes and have it analyzed for presence of ANS like zebra mussel larvae and spiny water fleas – two species that are expanding in neighboring Minnesota. These species are virtually impossible to detect in water without magnification, and their presence is one reason why anglers and boaters can no longer bring in boat or bait water from other states, and why draining water from boats and bait in North Dakota is necessary.

Another reason is VHS disease – viral hemorrhagic septicemia – a fish virus that could also travel undetected in water. Currently, VHS exists in Wisconsin, but not Minnesota.

Game and Fish will continue monitoring work this summer, with a focused effort to look for milfoil up and down the Sheyenne River. “I am concerned that we will find that it may have spread,” Schlueter acknowledged.

That same concern is evident across the rest of the state as well. “We’ve got to keep vigilant,” Schlueter emphasized. “Once an ANS is established, it’s almost impossible to eliminate. Our fishing waters are valuable, and ANS can take away their productivity.”

CRAIG BIHRLE is the Game and Fish Department’s communications supervisor.



Last summer, enforcement and fisheries personnel scheduled a few road checks to keep boaters informed about new aquatic nuisance species laws. Anglers and recreational boaters – and waterfowl hunters in the fall – should look for more of these efforts this year.

On the Web

Learn more about ANS on the Game and Fish Department’s website at gf.nd.gov/fishing/ans.html.

ANS HOT SPOTS	
Curly Leaf Pondweed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lake Audubon – McLean County. • McClusky Canal – McLean County (downstream from Lake Audubon). • McDowell Dam – Burleigh County. • Missouri River and Lake Oahe – Garrison Dam to South Dakota border. • Lake Sakakawea – Garrison Dam to Williston. • Riverdale Spillway Lake – McLean County. • Sheyenne River – Barnes County.
Eurasian Water Milfoil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sheyenne River – Valley City upstream approximately 4 miles. • Dead Colt Creek Reservoir and creek (tributary to Sheyenne River) – Ransom County.