

# **FINAL REPORT - 2006 AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES PROGRAM**

## ***IOWA GREAT LAKES***

*November 15, 2006*

### ***Introduction***

Many people who live on the Iowa Great Lakes or visit our wonderful lakes are concerned that our lakes could become infested with Aquatic Invasive Species. Eurasian milfoil creates a thick mat of weeds that makes it impossible to boat, swim or fish. Zebra mussels clog water systems and cut swimmers feet. Milfoil has infested lakes around the Twin Cities while zebra mussels have been found in Clear Lake. Once Invasive Species have gained a foothold it is almost impossible to get rid of them.

Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) have been found in Iowa's lakes and rivers. Eurasian watermilfoil has been discovered in Crystal Lake in Hancock County and St Benedicts Pond in Kossuth County – within 60 miles of the Dickinson County lakes. In 2005 and again in 2006 Zebra Mussels were found in Clear Lake. Many Minnesota lakes have become infested with Eurasian milfoil – particularly around the Twin Cities. If these Aquatic Invasive Species are allowed to gain a foothold in Dickinson County the impact to Dickinson County water quality and economy would be severe.

### ***Aquatic Invasive Species Program***

Planning for the summer 2006 Aquatic Invasive Species program began in the fall of 2005. The plan was for Iowa Department of Natural Resources personnel to educate boaters and inspect boats and trailers entering or exiting the Iowa Great Lakes. It was determined that three DNR personnel would be sufficient to have an impact, but not so many as to be to make the program too expensive. In order to hire three summer officers for the 2006 summer the Iowa Great Lakes Water Safety Council raised \$32,000. Funding was supplied by the: Messengers of Healing Winds, Okoboji Protective Association, Alliant Energy Foundation, East Okoboji Lakes Improvement Corporation, Spirit Lake Protective Association, Conservation Foundation of Dickinson County, Mau Marine, Oak Hill Marina, Bridgewater Boats, and an individual donor.

It was decided the most effective program would be for the DNR Law Enforcement Bureau to hire three summer Water Patrol Officers. This is the same type of position used by the DNR for the past thirty-plus years to staff the summer Lake Patrol. The typical applicant is a junior or senior college student majoring in environmental studies. Because the DNR Law Enforcement Bureau would employ these officers they will have the authority to issue citations for violations, although the program emphasis is soft enforcement through education and voluntary compliance.

### ***Program Implementation***

The funding for AIS was combined with DNR water safety funding, so a total of eleven summer Water Patrol Officers were hired. This pool of eleven summer officers could then work on water safety or invasive species depending on the needs for a particular day and time of day. With this AIS funding the DNR supplied 1,920 hours of Water Patrol Officer time focused on invasive species activity. The DNR received 83 percent of the funding. The DNR also furnished housing for the summer officers at Gull Point and Templar Park. The remainder of the money was spent by the Water Safety Council for additional equipment for the three additional invasive species officers.

When assigned to work on Aquatic Invasive Species the summer officers were to educate boaters about how invasive species can be transported on their boats and trailers. These officers also conducted inspections to be sure boats and trailers were free of invasive species before the boat and trailer entered the lake and also when they left the water.

The summer DNR officers started in mid to late May and received DNR training prior to the first major boating weekend – Memorial Day weekend. The summer officers began going back to college in mid August, but almost all returned for the last big boating event of the summer – Labor Day weekend. Two summer officers were available through September and one summer officer worked with duck hunters on the smaller lakes through late October.

The eleven summer DNR officers were hired by Rich Jordet, District Supervisor for the NW Iowa DNR Law Enforcement District. These officers were managed in their day-to-day activity by local Conservation Officer Gary Owen. A detailed work schedule was devised by Bill Maas (33-year summer officer experience) that optimized the assignments for water safety and invasive species. This comprehensive

work schedule specified work hours for each activity on weekdays vs. weekends along with the number of officers for each hour of the day.

Six boat ramps received the most number of hours due to the greater boater activity and/or the greater likelihood boaters could be becoming from lakes known to have invasive species.

High Priority Boat Ramps

Medium Priority

Emerson Bay

Mini Waukon

Highway 9 Bridge

Lazy Lagoon

Hattie Elston

Hinshaw Bridge -Upper  
Gar

Marble Beach

Dam Road

Templar Harbor

East Okoboji Beach

Isthmus- Ainsworth Beach

Arnolds Park City Park

In addition to the boat ramps listed above there are many smaller – less well known Dickinson County lakes and sloughs with boat ramps: Christopherson, Diamond, Grovers, Hottes Jemmerson, Lilly, Little Spirit, Marble, Prairie, Spring Run, Sunken, and Yeager. These lakes received attention during September and October with the one or two remaining summer officers, because of their use during waterfowl hunting season.

At least one officer, sometimes two, would begin their day at 6 AM at a boat ramp working the invasive species program. In that role they would talk to boaters about cleaning their boat before entering the lake and how to identify Aquatic Invasive Species. Beginning around 8 AM officers would split their work hours between water safety and the invasive species program. After 11 PM - until 5 AM - the emphasis was on watching for boaters whose navigation skills might be impaired.

Officers traveled to a boat ramp by Lake Patrol boat. This had two advantages:

1) The presence of a Lake Patrol boat at the boat ramp showed greater DNR presence and

2) the Lake Patrol boat was immediately available in case of an emergency call. Lake Patrol officers were equipped with a personal handheld two-way radio that provided immediate contact with the Spirit Lake Emergency 911 Communications Center as well as other police, fire, rescue, and ambulance personnel. With this radio contact officers could run a quick license check on a suspicious boat or person or request assistance.

During the summer more than 2100 boats and trailers were inspected for invasive species. With an average of 3 – 4 people per boat; there were more than 6,000 persons educated about how to prevent the spread of invasive species. It is believed this individual person-to-person contact had a far greater impact than if the invasive species message was communicated only by newspapers, radio news, television, and boat ramp signs.

This Aquatic Invasive Species program received considerable favorable publicity. It was reported in the local newspapers, local radio station news programs, Sioux City TV stations, Okoboji Yacht Club newsletter, three lake protective association newsletters, and on the Water Safety Council website [www.watersafetycouncil.org](http://www.watersafetycouncil.org)

As part of the DNR Aquatic Invasive Species program the DNR has designed new AIS billboards, gas pump toppers, flying banners, and boat ramp signs. By May the AIS billboard in Spirit Lake (near Hy-Vee) had been changed to the new design. Gas pump toppers were used at Parks Marina, Okoboji Boats; along with Spirit Lake gas stations: Casey's, Pronto, Vicks Corner, and Jennings. Three flying banners became available in August and will be used at public meetings in the lakes area. By next spring's boating season the new red and white boat ramp signs will replace the old orange invasive species signs.

Part of the original plan was to have stickers to place on trailers for those boaters that had been through the interview process and were familiar with how to prevent the spread of Aquatic Invasive Species. At their next boat ramp visit the education and inspection process could be strategically shortened based on the use of the sticker and their demonstrated knowledge of the process. Due to a printing mix up the stickers were not received for the 2006 program. They will be available for the 2007 program.

A boat was brought from Wisconsin to Parks Marina last spring for engine repairs. When the Parks Marina mechanic opened the engine this summer he found what appeared to be an infestation of Zebra Mussels. The Parks mechanic called the Lake Patrol to verify what he found was indeed Zebra Mussels. A conservation officer confirmed these were indeed Zebra Mussels. The engine was decontaminated and this boat was not used on the Iowa Great Lakes.

There were no verified Aquatic Invasive Species found on boats or trailers at boat ramps. This is the positive benefit of the invasive species program that the public around the Iowa Great Lakes are now more aware of the threat to our lakes posed by invasive species. Invasive species are in lakes and rivers surrounding the Iowa Great Lakes. Our protection is highly dependent on the effectiveness of our education program.

### ***Looking Forward***

All of the invasive species interview information has been entered in a computer database. Over the winter the DNR Invasive Species Coordinator will analyze that data for additional clues about how we can prevent the introduction of Aquatic Invasive Species into Iowa lakes.

This is the most proactive step taken to protect the Iowa Great Lakes from hostile invasive species. It is our expectation this program will be continued for 2007 and future years. The increase in Iowa boat registration fees approved by the legislature in the spring of 2005 will be used to fund this Aquatic Invasive Species program in 2007 and beyond.