

The High Cost of War

By Jim Brakken

Article provided courtesy of Bayfield County Lakes Forum
(www.bayfieldcountylakes.org)

Most of us have heard about aquatic invasive species (AIS) and don't want these in our lakes. Curly leaf pondweed and Eurasian Watermilfoil (EWM) can literally take over shallow to moderate depths of a lake and bring boating, swimming and fishing to a stop. Zebra Mussels can wipe out a lake's food chain and carpet beaches with razor-sharp shells. Purple Loosestrife can take over wetlands and shores, crowding out native plants and animals. Other invaders loom on the horizon.

Nobody wants these in our lakes but, unfortunately, too few take the AIS threat seriously enough. After all, the only inland lakes in Bayfield County that have EWM are Tomahawk, Sandbar and the Pike Lake Chain. But consider this: Lake Superior carries EWM and many other invasives. Sawyer County has a dozen lakes with EWM and there are more in Douglas and other neighboring counties. We've been fighting Purple Loosestrife for years and Zebra Mussels are just one fishing trip away. We know that if more AIS find their way into our waters it will greatly impact our local tourism, property values and our enjoyment of our lakes and streams. And once AIS gets a foothold in a lake, it can spread rapidly and be virtually impossible to eliminate. All that we can do is attempt to manage it and the cost of management can be astronomical.

Consider EWM for example. It grows best in depths of 1 to 20 feet. A dime-size fragment can spread across an entire bay in just a few years. It can live for a week out of water. EWM even grows during the winter when our native plants are dormant, making it almost impossible for them to compete. It grows so thickly that boats can't get through. One U of M swim team member drowned after getting tangled in EWM in Lake Minnetonka. He was the second to lose his life there due to EWM. This invader causes extreme changes in the lake ecology and fishery. Property values plummet. Herbicides can treat but not eliminate it. You can multiply the acreage of your lake by \$800 to \$1,000 to get a ballpark figure of the cost of treatment with most coming from local funds. Tomahawk and Sandbar were treated last summer. The \$75,000 bill included CB/CW training and monitoring. The Minong Flowage will begin a \$200,000 EWM treatment this spring. Clear Lake in Sawyer County, has spent nearly \$100,000 on their 100 acre lake and, again, that's for *management*, not a cure. Larger lakes often don't bother with herbicides. They purchase several \$100,000 harvesters and pay about \$50,000 more to run each unit every year, just to remove the plant from key areas. Lake Minnetonka, a poster-child for EWM problems, spends over \$400,000 each year on harvesting. Just like mowing the lawn, it comes back every two weeks. Whatever management method is used, the best outcome is a temporary reduction so boaters can more easily access deeper parts of the lake.

We know a few other things about AIS. They are transported from lake to lake almost exclusively by people, usually on boats and trailers. We know that fishermen on typical 'weekend getaways' from the major population centers will average three lakes per day. (Locals and seasonal residents are far less likely to

transport AIS than these fellows.) It is clear that, with so many contaminated lakes near our county, the risk is very high. We know, too, that *last summer 16% of the 41,656 boats checked in Wisconsin by CB/CW personnel had aquatic plants on them when they arrived at the landing.* That's over 6,600 plant-carrying boats! (UWEX LAKE TIDES, August 2008) And we know more. We've learned that the penalty for violating the transport law may not be enough to change the behavior of many of these boaters. We know what this does to property values. We have examples of lake homes selling for 25% to 50% less than they should because of EWM and we know this loss results in a shortfall of revenue that is important to local, county, and state programs. We have talked to tourists who come here because our waters are not yet ruined and we know how important it is to keep our waters clean and healthy in order to keep them coming. We are also aware that, if our grandkids and their grandkids have any hope of enjoying our lakes, it falls on us to keep our waters AIS free.

The bottom line is this: **It is the boaters who use our landings that will determine what our lakes will look like in future years.** BCLF will do all we can to get better AIS laws and educate and encourage folks to clean their trailers and boats, inspect their lakeshores, and contribute in other ways. We will also work with towns and lake associations to take advantage of grants and the other tools available. **BCLF asks all who value our waters to pitch in however possible.** That may mean taking a CB/CW class, volunteering at a landing, advising a guest, starting or joining a lake association, voting for the right candidate and/or becoming a BCLF Individual Member. Those who lack the time or opportunity to volunteer should consider making a generous tax-deductible contribution to your local or county AIS prevention program. Fortunately, because most AIS grants are matched 3 to 1, ***every dollar you give is worth \$4 toward the war on AIS.***

At the risk of overemphasis, **everything possible must be done to keep AIS out of our lakes.** Each one of us must do our part. Make no mistake: The health of our northern lakes tomorrow is up to each and every one of us today.