

Clean Boats/ Clean Waters by John See

Last spring the Tainter/Menomini Lake Improvement Association was awarded an Aquatic Invasive Species Control Grant by the DNR. This was a matching funds grant in the amount of \$5,887.50. The purpose of the grant was to develop new signage for the landings, and to initiate a citizen volunteer effort to educate and monitor boaters regarding aquatic invasive species.

New Signage We purchased new signs for the eleven boat landings on lakes Menomini, Tainter, and Eau Galle. This was necessary because the old signs were not adequately informing the public about the increasing dangers of AIS (aquatic invasive species). The message on the new signs is intended to alert boaters to the threat, and to remind them, in a friendly way, that the law prohibits launching any watercraft that harbors invasive species.



The signs are 4' x 6' and made of an industrial grade vinyl finish on weatherproof plywood. According to the manufacture they are supposed to last for about seven to ten years. They cost \$360 each.

Many individuals and groups offered input on the design of the signs. We looked at signs used on other lakes in Wisconsin and we considered the colors, images, and messages that we wanted to convey. The commercial art work was donated by Corinna See.

The installation of the signs on Tainter and Menomini was done with donated labor and materials from the Tainter/Menomini Lake Improvement Association, the

Tainter Lake Sportsmen's Club, and the Menomonie Parks Department. The Lake Eau Galle Sportsmen's Club has agreed to provide the materials and labor to erect their two signs this coming season.

Volunteers Three categories of volunteers participated in this program:

1) Clean Boats/Clean Waters Monitors: There were seventeen people who became Clean Boats/Clean Waters volunteers and came to the landings on multiple occasions. They were the heart and soul of the program. Their main job was to talk to boaters and provide them with educational materials as well as advice on how to check their boats and trailers for invasive species. Another function was to collect data for the DNR about the boating patterns on our lakes. This involved filling out a standardized form that identified such things as the type of boat, horsepower, number of passengers, previous waters visited, existence of invasives, etc. This information will be added to the statewide data base so researchers and policymakers will have a more accurate picture of boating patterns and how invasive species might be spreading.

2) Volunteers for AIS Workshops: There were twenty five local citizens who attended three 2.5 hour workshops that were conducted by Jo Heuschele from the Beaver Creek Reserve. These workshops were conducted at the boat landings on Lake Menomin and provided participants with a basic knowledge of the main invasive species that threaten our waters. Eight of these individuals later became Clean Boats/Clean Waters monitors.

3) UW-Stout Biology Students: There were twenty Stout students who volunteered to help with our monitoring of the boat landings. These students were fulfilling a course obligation for two hours of community service. They received a brief introduction to AIS and to the Clean Boats/Clean Waters protocol that is used throughout the state

Statistical Results: The following data were taken from the Watercraft Inspection Daily Work Diaries that were filled out by the volunteers each time they worked. We had a total of 37 volunteers who worked during the months of July, August, and September. They logged 167 hours at the landings and inspected 130 boats, and talked to 220 people.

We did not encounter a single watercraft that appeared to have AIS attached. The majority of the boats we saw belonged to local citizens who had not recently been on infested waters. We did not identify any boats that had been on the Winnebago chain where the dreaded VHS virus is known to exist. We did, however, have numerous boats coming from the Mississippi River, Lake Eau Galle, Lake Wissotta, etc., where there are known populations of invasives such as Eurasian water milfoil and zebra mussels. And while our volunteers did not identify any

AIS, that does not mean it wasn't there, or that it wasn't introduced when our volunteers were not present, which was the vast majority of the time.

Over the summer we randomly checked the number of boat trailers at the various landings and found that there was little usage of most landings during weekdays but the usage increased substantially on weekends. However, even on weekends, there were relatively few boats on our lakes compared to other lakes in Wisconsin. There was only one time during the entire summer when we found a landing with all of the parking slots filled, and that was at Point Comfort during a bass tournament.

Summary: The good news is that we had a fairly successful first year in terms of participation by a variety of stakeholders. We feel lucky that we did not see any boats that had invasive species attached. The majority of the boaters we talked to were cordial and seemed to appreciate our efforts.

The bad news is that we are still surrounded by a host of aquatic invasive species that are creeping closer every year. We've dodged the bullet so far because of our geographical isolation from infested waters, but our luck will run out unless we become more vigilant and get more help from our fellow citizens. This past summer our volunteers were stretched so thin that they could only monitor the landings for several hours on an average weekend.

We hope that this pilot project represents a useful first step in promoting the community involvement that will lead to a more comprehensive abatement program in the future.

If you have any suggestions or would like to volunteer contact John See at seej@uwstout.edu.