

# Starry Stonewort (*Nitellopsis obtusa*)

## Frequently Asked Questions

### What is it?

Starry stonewort (*Nitellopsis obtusa*) is a plant-like macroalgae. Similar to our native muskgrass (*Chara sp.*) species, it is a benthic (bottom) growing species that is loosely rooted to the lake bed. <http://goo.gl/ug99IS>

### Where is it?

It was first discovered in the U.S. in the St. Lawrence River in 1978 and spread into lakes in the northeastern U.S. More recently it has become established throughout Michigan and in some Indiana lakes. It has now been confirmed in several SE Wisconsin lakes. Ongoing monitoring in area lakes will help better determine its extent in Wisconsin.

### Why is it a problem?

Starry stonewort has impacts like many invasive aquatic plants - it can reduce fish spawning habitat, outcompete other vegetation, limit access and fragments can foul watercraft motors.



### How does it spread?

Trailered watercraft are the most common vector for the secondary spread of aquatic invasive species. Starry stonewort is likely spread the same way. Its initial invasion pathway was probably ballast water.

### What is being done?

Once established, starry stonewort has proven difficult to eliminate, making prevention our most effective option. The department supports communities in the Clean Boats Clean Waters Program (CBCW) and provides state funding to help inspection programs that are the front line efforts to prevent spread. <http://goo.gl/41z1xG>

The DNR has Early Detection and Response grants for new pioneer populations of aquatic invasive species available for the affected communities that can be used for removal and control, monitoring and to hire watercraft inspectors. <http://goo.gl/x8gJwF>

Little Muskego Lake Management District has been awarded a grant that is being used for hand harvesting, suction harvesting and CBCW. Additional grants are being developed to address new discoveries.

Department and local trained staff are conducting additional monitoring in the affected and surrounding lakes to determine the extent of the invasion. The DNR and UW Extension are working to recruit and train Citizen Lake Monitoring Network Volunteers to help identify other populations. <http://goo.gl/Ypvz61>

Adaptive management efforts that include the use of multiple prevention and control techniques are underway to prevent further spread and control existing populations. Though not ruled out completely, chemical treatments have had little success in other states, so the DNR is exploring other control options including hand pulling and suction harvesting.

## Why doesn't DNR close the public boat ramps when a new invasive species is discovered?

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources does not have the authority to close a public boat launch it does not own. In addition municipal public boat launches that have received state funding to acquire, develop or improve it must request approval from the Department before changing its operation. Typically the Department has allowed temporary closure of a municipal public launch for safety reasons. Counties and Towns that own public launch sites must follow Wisconsin State Statutes 66.1006 in order to abandon an access site.

While we understand the desire to close launches in the face of new AIS, the Department recommends implementing the Clean Boats Clean Waters program which allows the launch to remain open but significantly reduces the risk of spreading AIS. This will maintain the recreational and economic value of the lake without increasing the risk of spreading AIS.

## Why doesn't DNR require decontamination when leaving waters with known populations of invasive species?

The Stop Aquatic Hitchhiker! guidance of "Inspect, Remove, Drain, Never Move" is effective at preventing the spread of invasive species. If every boater took these steps, new introductions of aquatic invasive species would approach zero. This guidance combined with the CBCW watercraft inspection program has raised awareness of aquatic invasive species among boaters and these efforts have been shown to change boater behavior. The DNR is confident that the Stop Aquatic Hitchhikers! guidance and CBCW provides adequate protection to Wisconsin waters.

When dealing with invasive aquatic plants, research has shown that visual inspection and hand removal is as effective at removing vegetation from watercraft and trailers as a high pressure wash. High pressure wash and decontamination units are most efficiently used when preventing the spread of small-bodied organisms like spiny water fleas.

## Will a new aquatic invasive species take over my lake or river?

Invasive species tend to follow similar distribution patterns as native species – they are *commonly rare and rarely common*. In most places they tend to fit in with the biological community. In a few unfortunate places, a new invasive species becomes very abundant and undesirable impacts are readily noticeable.

## Won't wildlife like ducks and turtles move invasive species, making these efforts futile?

Research from the UW-Madison Center for Limnology reinforces the fact that people, not animals, are the primary way invasive species are transported. Even if wildlife have the capability to move invasive species, the natural dispersal of species is slow and can be difficult to manage. Unlike wildlife, human behavior can be modified to reduce the risks of that behavior. This is why prevention efforts are focused on human behaviors and activities.

## What can I do?

- Practice clean boating and set a good example at boat launches – "Inspect, Remove, Drain & Never Move" to help Stop Aquatic Hitchhikers!
- Become a CBCW volunteer and staff a landing to educate boaters and help them clean their equipment.
- Become trained on the identification of invasive species and help be on the lookout for new populations

To learn more about starry stonewort, [visit dnr.wi.gov](http://visit.dnr.wi.gov), and search for "[regulated invasive algae](#)."  
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