

Final Report, AIS Grant (AEPP-260-11)

Project Summary

The project officially began on Sunday, May 1st, 2011 with the attendance of 19 interested students and 15 adult volunteers at an AIS Workshop held at the Community Center in Solon Springs, Wisconsin. Joanne Zosel, Coordinator of the Clean Boats/Clean Waters Program for Upper Lake St. Croix conducted the workshop from 7:00-8:30 pm. Boat landing inspections began with the fishing opener on Saturday, May 7th and extended through Labor Day weekend for a total of 18 weekends. During that period two landing sites were monitored each weekend for a total of 51 hours per weekend. For the 18-week period, inspection teams were present at landing sites a total of 918 hours, or a total of 1221 student worker and adult volunteer hours. During this period, monitors inspected a total of 1314 boats entering and/or leaving Upper Lake St. Croix. Along with inspecting the boats for plants before launching, the inspection teams also checked boats coming out of the water to make sure they left the landing sites free of plant materials and carrying no water. The teams handed out educational materials such as Eurasian Water Milfoil and Purple Loosestrife informational packets, and bait rules. They reminded over 3440 boaters about the water and plant transport laws, the 100' no-wake law, and the problems associated with invasive species. While informing boaters about the threat posed by the introduction of Eurasian Water Milfoil and other aquatic invasive species into our lake, the monitors demonstrated proper inspection procedures boaters can employ on their own to ensure their boats and trailers don't transport invasive species to other lakes.

Achievement of Project Goals

1.) Monitoring boat landings:

Student workers for the project were recruited from the local high school in late April. Adult volunteers were solicited from the Upper St. Croix Lake Association, the Village and Town Boards of Solon Springs, and the broader Solon Springs Community beginning in late April and continually throughout the summer. A training session was held for the student workers and the adult volunteers before monitoring began on Sunday, May 1st in the local Community Center from 7:00 to 8:30 pm. The training session was attended by a total of 34 students and adults. Carrie Sanda, Douglas County AIS Coordinator, also held two other training sessions at the same location at later dates for interested adults in surrounding communities.

Two boat launches were monitored each weekend by trained boat inspectors between May 7th (fishing opener) and Labor Day. The boat launches were located at the end of Main Street in Solon Springs, a.k.a. the St. Croix Inn Site, and also along County Road A, a private launch site at Lakeview Lodge. The St. Croix Inn Site was monitored from 7:00 am – 7:00 pm Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays, and also on holiday Mondays (Memorial Day and the 4th of July). The Lakeview Lodge Site, being traditionally less busy, was monitored from 7:00 am – 4:00 pm on Saturdays and 7:00 am – 1:00 pm on Sundays. The DNR launch site, a.k.a. Palmer's Landing on County Road A, was initially

a consideration for monitoring. This idea was abandoned very early on as the launch itself is in a state of disrepair. It has been on the State docket for years now to undergo a facelift and until that happens it does not seem fruitful to spend our resources so frivolously. At each site, one trained student and at least one adult volunteer inspected the watercrafts. Only adult volunteers monitored the launch sites the first two weekends, May 7-8 and May 13-15 and the last weekend of the project, September 2-5 as students were unavailable because of school sports and other activities revolving around school. During the 18 weeks of the project inspectors were present at the launch sites a total of 918 hours or a total of 1221 student worker plus adult volunteer hours.

2.) Education of boaters regarding AIS and prevention:

During the 18 weeks of the project, monitors inspected a total of 1314 boats entering and/or leaving Upper Lake St. Croix. Along with inspecting the boats for plants before launching, the inspection teams also checked boats coming out of the water to make sure that they left the landing site free of plant materials and carrying no water. The inspection teams also handed out educational materials, placed Stop Hitchhikers stickers on boater's trailers and talked with over 3440 boaters about the problems associated with aquatic invasive species. In addition to informing the boaters about the threat posed by the introduction of Eurasian Water Milfoil and other aquatic invasive species into our lake, the monitors demonstrated proper inspection procedures that boaters could employ on their own to ensure their boats and trailers arrive at landing sites free of plant materials in the future. They also informed boaters of the no transport laws and the 100-foot no wake zone regulation. While carrying out the watercraft inspections, students asked boaters questions about their boating practices and knowledge about AIS and they in turn used this information to fill out daily Watercraft Inspection Reports. These reports were completed for each launch site during each 3-hour monitoring session and then all of this survey data was entered into the Wisconsin DNR CB/CW database (SWIMS).

During the busiest weekend of the summer, July 1st - 4th, 183 boats were inspected at the launch sites. During this weekend alone, inspectors talked with more than 550 boaters about AIS. The landing site at the end of Main Street in Solon Springs, a.k.a. St. Croix Inn Site, was routinely the busiest launch site throughout the boating season. During all boat inspections, inspectors asked boaters questions about their boating practices and used this information to fill out Watercraft Inspection Reports. The reports were completed for each launch site during each 3-hour monitoring session and all of the survey data was entered into the CB/CW database (SWIMS).

3. & 4.) Public Education about AIS:

Public education of lake property owners, Lake Association members, and the broader Solon Springs community was achieved through the publication of articles in newsletters and local newspapers and the distribution of brochures at public events and places. The coordinator also set up a project table at an afternoon expo to talk about aquatic invasive species concerns with local participants and to garnish volunteer names for the CB/CW program. There were three CB/CW workshops held at the Solon Springs Community Center for area volunteers, or those who yearned to become a volunteer. The coordinator held the first of these workshops during the onset of the project on May 1st. Douglas County AIS Coordinator, Carrie Sanda, held the other two workshops. While 34

students and volunteers participated in the May 1st workshop, several members of the Solon Springs community at large participated in one of the others. As we approached mid-August and plant matter began to thicken in the lake, adult volunteers were often personally trained by the coordinator on what to look for in the case of Eurasian Water Milfoil. This usually resulted in a lesson of leaflet numbers or structure and they turned out to be either Northern Water Milfoil or Coontail, both of which are native in Upper Lake St. Croix. This prompted the procurement of DNR publication WT-783. This two-sided manila handout became essential to include in our packets of “boater information” during the final push of the project through Labor Day.

An Upper Lake St. Croix Advisory Committee, which includes personnel from both the Town and the Village Boards, the St. Croix Lake Association, Douglas County Forestry Department, Friends of the St. Croix Headwaters and the local high school, as well as community members at large, has been particularly interested in both the volume of watercraft using the lake and the distance boaters have traveled to use the lake. Together, we are trying to sort out a solution that will hopefully satisfy most of these patrons. The major driving force is the protection and preservation of Upper Lake St. Croix of which exotic species would render less than pristine. An initial announcement of the AIS grant along with a description of the proposed project and an invitation to attend the CB/CW boat-landing inspector training workshop went out to all members of the lake association, lake property owners, and residents within a mile radius of the lake in early May. A total of 15 community members, plus 19 students, attended this workshop. As this was the fourth (non-consecutive) year of this type of grant, several lake association members were already on board and ready to participate again as launch site volunteers. This fact, and an extensive calling effort on the part of the project coordinator culminated in the participation of 89 community members in the project, 20 students and 69 adults.

During the monitoring segment of the project, May 7th, 2011 to September 4th, 2011, the AIS project coordinator wrote an article for the local newspaper, an article for the lake association’s newsletter, participated in a Ladies Expo to garnish support/volunteers for the program, continued care of a rain garden to help mitigate soil erosion and harmful chemicals from reaching Park Creek, sent reminders to adult and student volunteers, as well as sat on the Board of Directors of Friends of the St. Croix Headwaters and the Upper St. Croix Lake Association. The coordinator and several student workers also had two work days in which they cut buds from blooming purple loosestrife in ditches and along the roadway from the village of Solon Springs all along County Road A. The first effort was 5 ½ hours in length and the 2nd effort was 3 hours in length. The coordinator enlisted village workers to help dispose of the noxious weed when the blossoms were harvested. Among other things, these efforts enabled the public to become more aware of the CB/CW monitoring program, solicited more volunteers, recognized the participation of local high school students as inspectors and community leaders, thanked community members who had volunteered, emphasized the importance of keeping the lake free of Eurasian Water milfoil, and solicited partnerships for continued lake vigilance. Although these efforts may not be viewed as spectacular, they clearly represent a successful fourth year effort of educating local anglers, boaters, lake property owners, and Solon Springs’ community members about AIS. Most importantly, let’s hope it prevented the invasion of AIS into Upper Lake St. Croix!

5.) Aquatic plant-monitoring results

Throughout the monitoring season from May 7th (fishing opener) through September 4th (Labor Day), 89 community members of Solon Springs monitored 2 boat landings for aquatic plants. On occasion, there were plant materials attached to props of watercraft upon vacating our lake, especially in the later part of the season. This prompted the intense scrutiny of each individual plant either by the student monitors or by the coordinator herself. The coordinator conducted a lesson of leaflet numbers or structure if the student monitor or monitoring adult was unsure of him/herself. The result was always either Northern Water Milfoil or Coontail, both of which are native in Upper Lake St. Croix. This prompted the procurement of DNR publication WT-783. This two-sided manila handout became essential to include in our packets of “boater information” during the final push of the project through Labor Day.

On August 8th, Lake Association President, James Heim ventured on Upper Lake St. Croix with Douglas County AIS Specialist, Carrie Sanda to set traps to help confirm the presence of rusty crayfish, and to do rakes at ten different locations checking for both Curly Leaf Pondweed and Eurasian Water Milfoil. On August 9th, James, Carrie, and the coordinator helped to confirm the presence of rusty crayfish, tested deeper waters for spiny water fleas, and also did approximately 10 more rakes at different locations to test for invasive aquatic plants. While the plant matter was thick in some areas, none of the plants gathered on either outing were invasive. We have not heard from the Douglas County AIS Specialist regarding our spiny water flea test but the DNR website will be updated so that it reflects our infestation of rusty crayfish.

6.) Purple Loosestrife Work

After much deliberation with Brock Woods, the state’s purple loosestrife biocontrol and wetland invasive plant coordinator, it was decided that we would spend our resources collecting beetles that were already hatched and cut blossoms on plants as they appeared. This seemed a logical next step in our beetle gathering, raising, and releasing that has taken much time, space, and energy. Unfortunately, weather-related turbulence caused a great deal of conflict with our scheduled outing dates for the collection of beetles. We therefore doubled our efforts in cutting blossoms. Students were utilized throughout this process from the Clean Boats/Clean Waters Program, as they are natural stewards for the environment. The first outing took place on August 2nd with eight students cutting from 1-4 pm. The coordinator continued working until approximately 6:30. The strategic locations were along County Highway A that runs practically parallel to Upper Lake St. Croix. The second outing took place on August 16th with nine students cutting from 10 am-1 pm. The coordinator was able to enlist the village workers to dispose of the noxious weeds this time so she did not have to stay late to run to the garbage dump nor to clean out a borrowed van. The strategic locations were: a wetlands native plant area which was designated years ago along Lakeshore Drive (southwest corner of the lake), directly across from Park Pond along Business 53, along Railroad Street from Main to the entrance to the Lucius Woods Park and where Park Pond dumps into Park Creek, and again, all along County Road A until the sanitary district. The coordinator took note that many of the plants had holes in them (due to the releasing of beetles from last year’s

effort) but that had not deterred the blossoms from appearing (thus scattering later in the season). Fifty-nine and one-half hours were devoted to the cutting, bagging, and disposing of the loosestrife blossoms. The students and the coordinator collected and disposed of 80 bags stuffed to the brim. We hope that this work helped prevent the further spread of purple loosestrife.