



Wisconsin DNR Weekly News Article

Discovery of two aggressive aquatic invasive plants underscores need to clean boats

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Plants found in popular Mississippi River waterfowl area

BUFFALO CITY, Wis. -- The recent discovery of two aggressive invasive plant species in a popular Upper Mississippi River waterfowl area underscores the need for waterfowl hunters to clean their boats and take other steps to avoid accidentally spreading invasive plants and nonnative species that can threaten waterways and future hunting opportunities, state and federal wildlife officials say.



Water lettuce.
WDNR Photo



Water hyacinth.
WDNR Photo

“This is the first time we’ve found these two species of invasive water plants in Pool 5,” said Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge Winona District Manager Mary Stefanski. “We are hopeful that none of these plants will survive if we get a cold winter, but we still need boaters to be vigilant.”

Pool 5 is by Buffalo City and encompasses river miles 750 to 739.

Bob Wakeman, who coordinates aquatic invasive species prevention and control efforts for the Department of Natural Resources, urges hunters to check their boats, trailers and other equipment before they launch and after they're done for the day.

"Please take a few minutes to inspect your boats and equipment, remove any plants and animals, and

drain water from your boat and equipment," he says. "These steps will prevent the spread of these new invasive plants, and will also help contain other aquatic invasive species and diseases that may be present."

DNR Water Guards and wardens will be checking boats at popular landings in the area and across the state, educating hunters about the rules and enforcing them. "The waterfowl hunting community is an important partner in the effort to prevent the spread of invasive species in Wisconsin's waterways," says DNR Chief Warden Randy Stark.

And DNR was working with the River Alliance of Wisconsin to post [signs at boat landings](#) (pdf; 629kb) in the area to alert hunters to the presence of water hyacinth and water lettuce in Pool 5 of the Upper Mississippi River.

Water lettuce and water hyacinth are two innocuous sounding invasive plants with outsized impacts: as few as 25 individual plants can expand to cover 10,000 square meters of water surface in one growing season, nearly enough to cover Lambeau Field twice. This expansion creates a thick, impenetrable mat of vegetation that prevents waterfowl from foraging.

Stefanski also notes that another invasive plant, purple loosestrife, has been spotted in larger than normal amounts along the river this year. She believes this is because many of the beetles that normally feed on the loosestrife and keep them under control may have died over the winter due to cold weather and high water. "We plan to release more of the beetles next summer to hopefully get the population of loosestrife back under control," she says.

Here is how hunters and others enjoying Wisconsin's outdoors can help protect their hunting, fishing and the state's natural resources from invasive species.

- If you see these plants or other plants on the watch list, please pull them and put them in a trash bag or other container to be disposed of in a landfill.
- If you find a large infestation that you are not capable of pulling contact the toll-free DNR information line at 1-888-WDNRINFO (1-888-936-7463).
- Inspect your equipment and remove all plants and animals before transporting.
- Follow all other state and federal laws to prevent the spread of invasive species and diseases.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: Bob Wakeman, DNR (262) 574-2149; Mary Stefanski, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (507)-494-6229