

Environmental

Berry Lake "Landing Blitz" Demonstrates Collaborative AIS Effort

Submitted Article
Berry Lake Association, Inc.

On Friday, July 5, representatives from the Menominee Tribe, Menominee County, and the Menominee Casino and Resort helped increase awareness about the threat of aquatic invasive species and ways to prevent their spread by participating in a "Landing Blitz" event at Berry Lake.

The "Landing Blitz" is a collaborative effort by citizen volunteers and aquatic invasive species experts throughout Wisconsin to educate boaters so they do not accidentally spread invasive plants like Eurasian water-milfoil, invasive animals like zebra mussels, or other aquatic invasive species (AIS).

This was the fifth annual Landing Blitz in Wisconsin where inspectors were stationed at approximately 300 boat landings from July 4th – 7th to help boaters understand Wisconsin's invasive species laws and what they must do before leaving a landing.

Because aquatic invasive species do not respect political boundaries and because Berry Lake lies on both sides of the Menominee/Oconto County line, a "Landing Blitz" event at the Berry Lake boat landing offers a unique opportunity for both Menominee and non-Menominee to collaborate on preventing the spread of AIS onto the Reservation and into Tribal lakes.

The Menominee Casino and Resort's Thunderbird Complex donated food and beverages for the gathering estimated to have attracted a total 75 people over two hours. Thunderbird Complex manager, Keith Tourtillott said, "The lakes surrounding the Thunderbird provide a corridor for AIS to invade Tribal lakes so it is important that we work with our neighbors with education and by supporting their AIS prevention efforts."

Underhill Chairman, Peter Vorpahl, echoed Keith Tourtillott by describing how keeping Berry Lake free of aquatic invasive plants is important not just for Berry Lake's riparian property owners but for everyone in the Town of Underhill and beyond.

Phragmites is an example of an invasive plant which is presently threatening to enter the Reservation from Berry Lake not far from the Thunderbird.

Phragmites is a tall reed that develops a showy seed head. People often think it is attractive until they discover how aggressive it becomes.

Phragmites created dense

stands over 12 feet tall covering miles of shoreland on the Bay of Green Bay. The impenetrable stands blocked views of the Bay and has taken a \$3,000,000 EPA grant and three years of helicopter and ground spraying just to begin to control it.

The Berry Lake Association (BLA) identified and mapped the rapid spread of invasive phragmites at Berry Lake. The BLA brought it to the attention of Menominee Environmental Services which agreed to collaborate with the BLA in having it treated before it spreads further at Berry Lake or enters the Menominee Nation.

During the Landing Blitz at Berry Lake, Menominee Environmental Services' Environmental Program Coordinator, Doug Cox, stressed the importance of collaborative relationships between agencies and organizations. He introduced the four-member Invasive Species Team comprised of team leader Tom Kenote, and team members Cierra Dickson, Wade Reiter, and Pehsapan Weso. Cox said they will be treating Berry Lake's phragmites during the second half of August.

Berry Lake community members welcomed the team and reported being impressed by their professionalism and discipline.

Berry Lake Association (BLA) president, Brian Ewart said the collaborative effort requires private property owners doing their part, "We need professionals and AIS experts to be part of the effort but riparian property owners cannot expect to outsource 100% of the care and maintenance of their lake to government agencies and private contractors," he said, "Paid outsiders might spend one day a year at Berry Lake. Berry Lake community members spend far more time at the lake. Riparian property owners need to learn what to look for, report what they see, and do their part in controlling AIS." Doing their part includes giving the Invasive Species Team access to their beaches.

Cheryl Root from the environmental organization "Northeast Wisconsin Alliance" drove to the Berry Lake Landing Blitz from Appleton to collect the signed permission forms from property owners allowing the Invasive Species Team to inventory and treat the phragmites they find. Root also administered a questionnaire asking Berry Lake community members about invasive species and types of control.

Root said, "The Berry Lake Landing Blitz is an example of what lake communities should be doing throughout the state to



Cheryl Root /Northeast Wisconsin Alliance

Berry Lake Association President, Brian Ewart, discusses the threats that aquatic invasive species pose to area lakes and the importance of reporting them when seen.

educate the public and stop the spread of aquatic invasive species."

Ken Grissman prepared the Berry Lake Association's information table, described the AIS threat, and handed out descriptions and photos of AIS threatening area lakes, including Berry Lake.

BLA Secretary and Northern Grace Youth Camp director, David Green, described the survey he is conducting to see if Berry Lake has already been invaded by the highly destructive Rusty Crayfish.

Oconto County's AIS Coordinator, Amanda Strick, spoke about the importance of the volunteers who inspect boats at landings in the Clean Boats/Clean Waters program. Strick said, "Having folks at boat landings to discuss the effects of moving invasive species from one location to another is the best way to encourage clean boating habits. Clean off all gear, drain all water (including livewells and minnow water), dry your equipment, and never move any organic matter from one place to another."

Berry Lake Property Owners Association president, John Holman, encouraged people to participate in the Clean Boats/Clean Waters program. "We need more volunteer boat inspectors to keep our Eurasian water-milfoil from moving out and to help keep new invasive species from moving in," he said, "Zebra Mussels from neighboring lakes would devastate Berry Lake."

DNR Warden Mike Stahl said, "Everyone has to do their part to stop the spread of AIS. Boaters need to obey the laws against AIS transport which include removing plants and animals from their boats and trailers and draining live wells. Volunteer boat inspectors ensure boaters know how to clean their boats and trailers. We (law enforcement) are available if needed to gain compliance."

Menominee Sheriff Robert

Summers spoke to the gathering about his department's support for stopping the transport of AIS. Afterwards, Sheriff Summers said, "That was a wonderful event and a great way to get the information out to everyone so they know what they need to do to protect our lakes from invasive species."

Legend Lake Protection and Rehabilitation District Chairman, Wayne Towne was impressed by the size of the crowd. Towne said the number of people at the Berry Lake Landing Blitz was especially impressive because it was "about the same number we had at our Lake Faire two years ago. Drawing from a much smaller base (Berry Lake) did very well." Indeed, Legend Lake has 16 – 24 times more people than Berry Lake.

"I continue to be impressed by the broad support and commitment of local citizens and leaders who make our shared natural resources a priority," Representative Jeff Mursau said.

The Berry Lake Association, which sponsored the Berry Lake Landing Blitz wants everyone to know the Fifth Annual Landing Blitz take home message is:

Boaters, anglers, and others enjoying Wisconsin waters are required to:

INSPECT boats, trailers, and equipment.

REMOVE all attached aquatic plants and animals.

DRAIN all water from boats, vehicles, and equipment.

NEVER MOVE plants or live fish away from a waterbody.

The AIS prevention laws that apply to Wisconsin waters are also best practices for keeping the Menominee Nation free of AIS.

Everyone should remember and follow these basic rules to help stop the spread of aquatic invasive species.