NOT WANTED – DEAD OR ALIVE

The Conesus Lake Watercraft Steward Program in its third year as our "first line of defense"

Our lake will be protected again this year by our watercraft steward program. The stewards with their familiar red shirts and hats will once again be at the boat launch from Memorial Day to Labor Day. Like last year, the stewards will help inspect and clean boats of any visible organic material while instructing the boaters in the use of "Clean/Drain/Dry" to prevent the introduction of aquatic invasive species to the lake. We are fortunate to have Anna Deats returning as head steward. Thanks to the generous amount of donations provided by CLA members, and cooperation with the Conesus Lake Watershed Council and Cornell Cooperative Extension, we will be able to continue to focus on busy weekends, holidays and fishing tournament evenings while adding weekdays on a rotating basis to reach out to an even greater number of peak time users.

Despite our own problems with aquatic invasive species (milfoil, curly pondweed, alewife and zebra mussels) we are fortunate to have avoided infestation by many other very nasty invasive species. Our "first line of defense" at the boat launch will be adding additional focus this year on inspecting boats launching from known infested areas (see below), as well as advising any of our boaters planning on going to these locations to be especially diligent in "Clean/Drain/Dry" so as to not bring back any unwanted hitchhikers. Below is a list of some of the more unsavory AIS species along with potential impacts and known locations THAT HAD BOATS VISIT US LAST YEAR.

(L:R, T:B - Hydrilla, Water Chestnut, Starry Stonewort, Asian Clam, Quagga Mussel, Spiny Waterfleas, Bloody Red Shrimp, Frogbit, Brittle Naiad, Mystery Snails)

Hydrilla: (Cayuga Inlet, Erie Canal – Tonawanda, and several PA counties) Hydrilla is capable of growing dense mats of vegetation in depths of water up to 25' of depth. Once infested, waters are virtually unusable to boats, fishing or swimming. Hydrilla has a terrific rate of growth (1" a day!) and spreads through several methods, so one plant is capable of producing upwards of 6000! Hydrilla is also know to encourage the growth of cyanobacteria (blue green algae)

Water Chestnut: (Braddock Bay, Seneca River, Oneida, Canandaigua and 3 other known locations) Water Chestnut creates a dense floating mat in calmer areas (like the south end) replacing native species and inhibiting boating and fishing. The plant produces nuts with 4 extremely sharp spines, each nut can produce 200 plants in the next year and can remain dormant for 12 years. In short time 1 acre of Water Chestnuts can become 1,000 acres.

Starry Stonewort: (Oneida, Ontario, Otisco, Canandaigua) Starry Stonewort is actually an algae, but one that can grow a dense mat of bottom vegetation up to 7' high in up to 29' of water. Not only will it outcompete virtually every other form of vegetation, its dense mat can completely eliminate spawning beds in a lake and cover all bottom structures that bass and other predators rely on to ambush other fish.

Asian Clam: (Canandaigua, Seneca, Keuka, Erie Canal and 3 other known locations) The Asian clam is a highly efficient breeder and feeder. The dense population will filter out large quantities of phytoplankton and bottom dwelling organisms. The clearer water along with a high level of nitrogen produced by their feeding (and eventual death) can stimulate the growth of algae and weeds and inhibit water quality.

Quagga Mussel: (Ontario, Seneca, Cayuga, Canandaigua and 3 other known locations) Quagga mussels are similar to Zebra mussels in many respects. Highly efficient feeders that attach to any hard surface. They filter out phytoplankton, disrupt the food chain, provide the nutrients and water clarity to stimulate algae and weed growth. Given we are on a downward trend of Zebra mussels, do we really want to invite its ugly sister to the dance?

Spiny Waterflea: (Lake Erie, Lake Ontario, Lake George) The easiest way to tell if you have spiny waterflea is your fishing line and eyelets look like they just fouled a large clump of cottonwood fibers. These creatures can become food for adult prey fish (bass, perch, walleye) but they prey on Daphnia and other important zooplankton thus reducing the food source for juvenile fish (perch, bass, alewife) eventually significantly reducing the fish population and negatively impacting the ecosystem. The Fishhook Waterflea (Seneca, Cayuga, Canandaigua, Ontario and 3 other know locations) is also a prolific breeder and creates many of the same problems, plus the long "fishhook" appendage makes it even less appealing food to fish.

Bloody Red Shrimp: (Oneida, Seneca, Ontario, Cayuga) Not much is known about the impact of this recently introduced ½" long shrimp. It can be found in vast swarms, it may eat waterflea but also decimates the zooplankton needed for a healthy ecology. It can serve as a food for larger prey fish but we don't want to take the risk.

Not enough room to talk about Brittle Naiad, Round Goby, Chinese and Banded Mystery Snails, Fanwort or Brazilian Elodea but they are out there too. Scared yet? – Good idea. Considering donating more next year to our Watercraft Stewards program – Not such a bad idea!!!

Regardless, please stop by and thank the Watercraft Stewards who so diligently try to stop the next AIS from being introduced here by inspecting, cleaning and educating over 4000 boats a year!! Finally, PLEASE ensure that after every visit you make to any other lake; you diligently **Clean/Drain/Dry** your equipment and boat; and ensure any visitors you have coming from other lakes do the same!!!!

Scott Proctor, CLA Director