

With AIS Prevention is Better Than a Cure

At 182 acres in size Green Prairie Fish Lake in Morrison County may not be as grand a body of water as nearby Mille Lacs, Gull or Alexander lakes, but to the anglers, pleasure boaters and paddlers who live in and around Little Falls it's an important recreational resource.

"It's a multiple-use lake that, because it's one of the closest to town, gets quite a bit of traffic during the open-water season," said Bruce Fogle, long-time lakeshore resident and President of the Green Prairie Fish Lake Landowners Association.



Bruce Fogle (right), with his wife Mary and association member volunteer Al Hoof (center) talk with boaters about preventing the spread of AIS at the Green Prairie Fish Lake public access.

The organization was established more than 40 years ago, according to Fogle, and at the time served largely as a social vehicle for its members. Today, however, the group is more dynamic in nature and takes a proactive stance in protecting the lake—namely from aquatic invasive species (AIS).

Like thousands of lakes across Minnesota, Green Prairie Fish is a small gem that provides a recreational outlet for steady streams of people during the warm months. The downside is that high-use waters like these are vulnerable to AIS that hitchhike from one water body to another on

boats, trailers, bait buckets—even on canoes, paddles and other gear that gets wet during use.

Curly-leaf pondweed is a prime example. It spreads from one water body to another by the accidental transfer of plant fragments that adhere to watercraft and other equipment, and though it doesn't create a terrible problem in every lake it invades, this non-native species can form mats of vegetation so dense that they displace native plants and even interfere with recreational use of the lake. First observed in Minnesota in 1910, the plant found its way into many lakes across the state, including Green Prairie Fish Lake.



This settling plate is one tool association volunteers use to determine the presence or absence of zebra mussels in Green Prairie Fish Lake.

But it was a new threat that emerged about six or seven years ago that really spurred the association action. “When zebra mussels were found in the Mississippi River and a few lakes in the area, the need to monitor Green Prairie Fish Lake for mussels became urgent.” said Fogle. “We also knew we had to make people aware of the threat.”

In response, Fogle wrote a proposal to the county for grant money to be

used for monitoring and community outreach. As a result, the association now has a specialized net designed to capture zebra mussel veligers (microscopic mussel larvae) from the water, as well as a number of settling plates that are set under select residential boat docks.

At least twice a summer, water samples taken with the test net are sent to a laboratory where they're examined for the presence of veligers. The settling plates are simply artificial habitat suitable for zebra mussels. Volunteers check them at the end of the summer to determine whether young mussels had taken up residence and grown to adult size. While there's no way to eradicate a zebra mussel population in an open water system, these early detection efforts are vital to stopping, or at least slowing, their spread to other waters.



"So far, all our sampling and monitoring have returned negative results," said Fogle. "We've found no zebra mussels in Green Prairie Fish Lake."

This speaks well of the community outreach phase of the association's battle plan. Fogle and three other trained volunteers set up a station at the lake's one and only public access at various times during the summer and discuss AIS with people before they launch and after they retrieve their watercraft.

"We explain how invasive plants and animals can not only adhere to

trailers and hull surfaces, they can be carried in livewells, baitwells and bilge water,” he said. “And if they need a bit more hands-on instruction, we’re happy to assist them in going over the boat.”

The volunteers work in pairs, he said, manning the access as many times as possible during the boating season, and focusing on high-use periods, such as the fishing opener and three-day weekends.

“For the most part the public’s reception has been very positive,” he said. “Most people understand and agree with what we’re trying to do.”

“The Green Prairie Fish Lake Landowners Association is very active and highly motivated,” said Galen Gruber, AIS and Shoreland Specialist with Morrison County’s Land Services Department. He coordinates with Green Prairie Fish and other lake associations, lending assistance where and when needed.

“They’ve had a lot of success because they’re focused on behavioral change; explaining to people why it’s important to prevent invasive species from taking hold rather than trying to treat them on the back end. It’s just a great group.”

This information is produced and distributed by the Mississippi Headwaters Board in an effort to motivate everyone to protect our natural resources. A recreation based lifestyle is part of our MN Traditions and is only preserved when we protect our aquatic resources from invaders such as zebra mussels and Eurasian milfoil. To support Minnesota Traditions join us on social media here

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