

Crow Wing County Opens New Doors To AIS Awareness

Officials in charge of AIS prevention in Crow Wing County turned a new page in their efforts to engage boaters and anglers.

A pilot program launched earlier this year is aimed at getting watercraft operators to make a commitment, verbally or in writing, to practice proper AIS prevention techniques, according to Brett Lyczkewski, Lead Inspector for Crow Wing County. Those who do take the pledge receive a handy AIS equipment starter kit.



Lead Inspector Brett Lyczkewski (left) presents an AIS equipment kit to an angler who pledged to help prevent the spread of AIS.

The objective, he explained, is to promote awareness of the kinds of problems invasive species cause in the environment and for native species. More importantly, they want to encourage boaters to take positive action against the spread of invasives by providing basic tools they can use to do the job. The kit contains a sponge to dry livewells and compartments, a wipe-down towel, bags in which to place leftover live bait, a flashlight to illuminate dark nooks and crannies, as well as educational materials and a trailer sticker.



Each kit includes a sponge, towel and flashlight to help watercraft owners clean and dry their rigs, plus informational material.

“We had the kits made up using funds from a grant by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources,” said Nicole Erickson, Environmental Services Specialist with Crow Wing County. “Our goal is to distribute 250 of them during the 2021 boating season.”

Crow Wing County, with more than 500 hundred lakes and rivers within its boundaries, is a premier destination for anglers and recreational boaters alike. This keeps Lyczkewski and his team of watercraft inspectors continually busy. By mid-July, in fact, they’d already logged more than 32,000 boat inspections.

And with this pilot program, they will not only be speaking with anglers and boaters about taking the pledge at high-traffic public accesses across the county, they will also address anglers who participate in a number of select DNR-permitted fishing tournaments throughout the season.

It’s actually a continuation of an idea that emerged in 2020 when inspectors attended a handful of tournaments and discussed AIS prevention with the participants. This year they’ll offer, and ask of, anglers even more.



Family Receives CWC Angler AIS Kit

“This is simply another way for us to get the word out and ask competitors to make the commitment,” Lyczkewski explained. “We’ll talk with the anglers during their pre-tournament meetings and discuss the importance of ‘clean-drain-dry’ for all boaters, and for fishermen, the need to dispose of live bait in a proper manner.”

This year’s effort to engage tournament anglers kicked off in July on the Whitefish Chain during an event put on by the Student Angler Organization, a group that promotes fishing and environmental awareness among the younger generation. Ten more tournaments are on the county’s schedule, including events on Platte Lake, Mille Lacs and Gull Lake, with the possibility of adding more if the opportunities arise.

“Our tournament schedule runs into September,” said Erickson, “but if we continue to see high traffic at the access ramps, there’s a possibility that we may hand out all the kits we have by sometime in August. If that’s the case, we’ll still move forward and work around these tournaments and have an inspector and our decontamination unit close to these events so that we can provide the fishermen with that service.”

Those in charge of protecting Minnesota's waters from aquatic invasive species are always looking for new and effective ways to educate and inspire watercraft operators. The out-of-the box thinking in Crow Wing County is certainly one of the success stories.

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