

## **Watershed Wisdom –More Aliens and UFOs**

Last week we talked a bit about “alien invaders” from foreign (to our watershed) ecosystems. Of Maine’s 6000+ lakes and ponds, 26 are known to be infested with invasive plants, including Eurasian and variable leaf milfoil, curly-leaved pondweed, and hydrilla. That this is a relatively small number is a tribute to Maine’s strong “Milfoil Law” and the small army of paid and volunteer courtesy boat inspectors that man public boat launches in order to help boaters learn about the dangers of invasive plants and how to inspect their boat before launch and after recovery.

Maine’s “Milfoil Law” (LD1812) was enacted in 2001 and makes it illegal to transport any aquatic plant or plant fragment, invasive or not, on the outside of a vehicle, boat, trailer, or other equipment. It requires all motorized boats used in freshwater to display a lake and river protection sticker that costs \$10 for residents and \$20 for nonresidents. This sticker is now part of the regular registration for Maine residents and no longer a separate sticker. There are substantial fines for noncompliance with this law—up to \$250 for failure to display the sticker, \$500 for transporting any plant fragment (\$2500 for repeat offenders), and up to \$5000 for transporting an invasive plant. Funds raised from sticker sales are used for outreach and education programs and to help pay for courtesy boat inspection (CBI) programs.

The Belgrade Regional Conservation Alliance (BRCA) administers one of the largest CBI programs in the state. Every summer, we work with the Lakes Environmental Association (LEA), the Maine Congress of Lake Associations (COLA) and DEP to train our team of paid and volunteer CBI’s that man (and woman) up all seven of the public boat launches in the Belgrade Lakes. These trained inspectors inspect over 6000 boats between Memorial Day and Labor Day and have prevented the spread of invasive plants on numerous occasions. More importantly, they have helped to educate over 6000 boaters every year about the importance of inspecting their own boat whether there is an inspector there or not.

While plants are the most visible of the aquatic hitchhikers, there are numerous other Unwanted Floating Organisms (UFOs) that our inspectors are looking for and trying to keep out of our lakes. Other potential aquatic invaders include Quagga mussels, Zebra mussels, Chinese Mystery Snails, Rusty crayfish, and a particularly pernicious diatom called *Didymo*, more commonly called, “rock snot.” While Quagga and Zebra mussels, have not yet been found in Maine, they are common in the Great Lakes and are spreading out from there. If your boat is coming from these waters, it should be thoroughly washed and inspected (including the live well) before launching in Maine waters. Chinese mystery snails are present in Maine, including in the Messalonskee Stream near where it enters the Kennebec River. They are larger (about the size of a golf ball) than any native Maine snails and you should thoroughly inspect all surfaces of your boat if you are in these waters. If you detect mystery snails, please contact the Center for Invasive Aquatic Plants (CIAP) of the Maine Lake Volunteer Monitoring Program (VLMP) at [mciap@mainevlmp.org](mailto:mciap@mainevlmp.org) to report your find. They are trying to document its spread in Maine.

Rusty crayfish are already established in the Belgrades in Great Pond. These crayfish, native to the Ohio River Valley, can be more aggressive than the native Maine crayfish and can displace them from their habitat. So far, this pest has not been that successful here, perhaps due to our aggressive smallmouth bass population, but it needs

to be monitored. Both the University of Maine and the Maine VLMP are continuing to monitor the spread of Rusty crayfish in this area. It is thought that these invaders were brought in by an out of state fisherman who brought live bait with him. Fishermen should be aware that it is illegal to bring live bait into Maine from out of state and it is illegal to release unused live bait into Maine waters whatever the source. Live bait should only be purchased from licensed Maine bait dealers who are only allowed to sell native, non-invasive species.

Rock snot is not yet present in Maine but it is present in Vermont in the upper Connecticut River. This organism forms dense mats on the bottom and looks like what you think based on its common name. It can be spread by anglers, especially those who wade in felt soled boots. Any time you move between waterbodies, to prevent inadvertent spread of UFOs, you should thoroughly wash and dry your equipment before fishing in new waters.

To learn more about any of these organisms, please stop in the BRCA office. We have brochures on some of them. Another good source is the CIAP web site at: <http://www.mainevolunteerlakemonitors.org/mciap/>

Enjoy the lakes, but beware of aliens and UFOs. **Don't pick up aquatic hitchhikers!**