

A Handbook for AIS Outreach at Michigan's Boating Access Sites



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The following background information and talking points are for volunteer partners to use during Michigan's 12th annual AIS Landing Blitz. This document summarizes key messages that should be delivered at the event. To view a short video recorded during a previous AIS Landing Blitz, visit <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KITfLBT4eb4>.

Background

Recreational boating can be a significant pathway for the spread of aquatic invasive species (AIS) between bodies of water. Michigan has more than 900,000 registered boats (not including out-of-state boats) that can potentially move between one or more water bodies, including 11,000 inland lakes and the Great Lakes, bays and connecting channels. The messaging in this document is designed to increase public awareness about AIS and assist boaters in taking preventative steps to avoid spreading AIS and comply with current AIS related laws.

More specifically, the following are key steps for raising awareness among recreational boaters:

- 1) Demonstrate how to visually check boats and recreational equipment for aquatic invasive
- 2) species;
- 3) Demonstrate where and how to clean and decontaminate boats and recreational equipment;
- 4) Raise awareness for Michigan's laws and regulations focused on preventing the spread of AIS; and
- 5) Distribute handouts with AIS prevention messaging such as key chain floats, winch post stickers, can koozies, towels and watch cards.
- 6) Record data about the event (see below)

Sample Script for approaching people at boating access sites

Only approach boaters before they are on the actual launch ramp or after they have moved away from the launch ramp. The parking lot and/or other areas where staging occurs are the most convenient locations.

Always begin by telling people who you are, who you represent, and why you are there. Ask if they have a few moments to talk about aquatic invasive species.

Sometimes you may only have a very short (~30 seconds) time to talk to boaters. If a boater is not interested in talking, simply offer them an AIS handout (floating key chain, towel, etc.) and wish them a nice day.

Other times you may have a longer period to interact. You can use the following script to help guide your discussion.

“Good morning/afternoon. My name is _____ from _____. We are talking with boaters about aquatic invasive species. Our focus is to prevent aquatic invasive species such as Eurasian water-milfoil and zebra mussels from spreading between lakes.”

Sample questions to guide your interaction:

“Are you familiar with aquatic invasive species and the harm they can do to Michigan’s lakes and rivers?”

“Do you know how to inspect and clean your boat and equipment to help lessen the likelihood of spreading AIS?”

“Do you mind if I demonstrate some inspection and cleaning tips?” (See below for watercraft inspection information)

“Are you aware of Michigan’s laws and recommended actions for boaters that protect our lakes from the spread of AIS?” (See **Required Actions** and **Additional Recommended Actions** below)

As you’re talking to boaters, remember these do’s and don’ts:

Do:

- Be courteous and polite
- Listen to boater’s concerns and remember we are trying to encourage boaters to become interested and take action to prevent the spread of AIS
- Make sure boaters know that they can make a difference
- Always introduce yourself and mention your organization and why you are at the boating access site

Don’t:

- Don’t delay boaters or cause a backup
- Don’t approach boaters while they are on the launch ramp
- Don’t begin by asking questions. Introduce yourself first!
- Don’t overly-emphasize or stress yourself out on identifying species correctly. The simple message is to remove all animal or plant matter, regardless of whether it is an invasive plant or native plant.

Whenever possible, try to mention the required and recommended actions below. Michigan’s AIS boater rack cards and boating access site signs contain this information, so be sure to hand them out and/or point them out.

Required Actions – It’s the Law in Michigan! (*Part 413 of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act PA 451 of 1994*)

- **Do NOT** launch or transport watercraft or trailers unless they are free of aquatic organisms, including plants.

- **Do NOT** transport a watercraft without removing all drain plugs and draining all water from bilges, ballast tanks, and live wells.
- **Do NOT** release unused bait into the water.

Violation of the law is a state civil infraction. Violators may be subject to fines.

Additional Recommended Actions – Protect Our Natural Resources!

- **Inspect and remove** plants and mud from boats and trailers and dry equipment before leaving the access area. Dispose of the material in a trash receptacle or otherwise away from the water body, if possible.
- **Wash** boats and trailers before leaving the access area if possible, at a nearby car wash, or at home.
- **Dry** boats and equipment for at least 5 days before launching into a different body of water.
- **Disinfect** live wells and bilges with bleach solution (1/2 cup bleach to 5 gallons water).

In summary, follow these simple steps to make sure your watercraft and gear are not transporting AIS and are in compliance with Michigan law:

- **CLEAN** boats, trailers and equipment.
- **DRAIN** live wells, bilges, ballast tanks, and all water by pulling drain plugs.
- **DRY** boats and equipment.
- **DISPOSE** of unwanted bait in the trash.

Boat inspection and cleaning locations

Use the following diagram to point out the important locations to check during an inspection for aquatic invasive species:



As you're talking about or demonstrating watercraft and equipment inspections for AIS, keep in mind the simple "Clean, Drain, Dry, Dispose" phrase.

Frequently Asked Questions from Boaters

- I can't get all the water out of my live well or bilge. Does that matter?
 - *Do the best you can by removing drain plugs, running pumps and using towels. It may be difficult to remove 100% of water in your watercraft, but give your best effort and you'll be helping to prevent the spread of AIS.*
- I don't see any mussel shells attached to my boat. Why worry about water in the boat?
 - *Certain life stages of zebra mussels (veligers) and other AIS can be very small and difficult or impossible to see. Additionally, diseases such as VHS can be transferred and spread through bilge and livewell water. Therefore, it's very important to drain all water from your gear and watercraft even if it appears clean and pure.*
- Do I have to clean my jetski or kayak?
 - *Yes. Any equipment or watercraft that comes in contact with the water can potentially spread invasive species. See the above answer regarding veligers and diseases. Even canoes, kayaks, and jetskis are subject to Michigan's AIS watercraft laws.*
- Isn't the spread of AIS inevitable? Why is the state wasting resources?
 - *There are still many water bodies that do not have AIS. Even if we can't keep all AIS out completely, we can still prevent a lot of widespread damage. The longer we can keep AIS out of a lake, the longer we put off the enormous long-term costs of management, control and property devaluation.*
- What is going on with invasive/Asian carp?
 - *Michigan is working with regional partners on short-term control measures to prevent the introduction of Asian carp. Additionally, Michigan supports hydrologic separation in the Chicago Area Waterway System. DNR Fisheries Division continues to conduct early detection surveillance through the use of environmental DNA and training exercises to increase overall preparedness and effectiveness of a potential response.*
- Aren't stocked coho salmon and chinook salmon non-native? Isn't the state intentionally introducing those invasive species?
 - *Invasive species are defined as non-native species that cause harm to the economy, the environment, or human health. Most people don't think that stocked non-native salmon are causing harm. In fact, they are beneficial for the economy in many ways.*
- I am not a scientist. How am I supposed to know how to identify these critters?
 - *It is more important to simply "Clean, Drain, Dry" your boat and equipment and remove all animal or plant matter, regardless of whether it is an invasive species or native species. Proper identification is not necessary for this type of prevention.*