

Preventing Invasive Species Infestation - 2020 Courtesy Boat Inspections (CBI) (Sal Girifalco)

While the Covid-19 Pandemic is keeping people from getting around, it has not stopped invasive species, such as milfoil, water chestnuts, hydrilla, and the dreaded zebra mussel. Precisely because invasives are still thriving and mobile, the Lakes Association of Norway (LAON) must maintain its Courtesy Boat Inspection for Lake Penneesseewassee.

We started a week early this season, on the weekend prior to Memorial Day. We recognized that since there was a very early ice out (about 3 weeks earlier than usual) and more people are spending time at home, fishing boats had been active on our lakes since early May. 84 boats were inspected that first weekend. Our inspectors are alert to the fact that any watercraft or its trailer can carry an unwanted aquatic hitchhiker (power boats, jet skis, canoes, or kayaks).

A hearty thanks to Norm Baker, who has volunteered to manage our CBI program this season. We are also fortunate to have our three experienced and dedicated inspectors back: Jerry Higgins, Ray Gange, and Larry Levesque. Last year they performed nearly 2,300 inspections, with roughly 700 of those on boats that had last visited another lake and were potential threats. They have been trained on operations in the Covid era, and are now following the recommended guide lines to wear masks and maintain physical distance to help protect themselves and all the boaters they see. If you go the Lake Penneesseewassee boat launch, please keep your distance and let our inspectors know you appreciate what they do.

While we provide an inspector for about 55 hours each week, we simply cannot inspect all boats on all of our lakes. The individual most responsible for preventing the spread of invasives is the boater. Our inspectors offer brochures that show all of Maine's infested water bodies and a guide for a quick inspection. [A copy of the guide is on our website under "Boater Responsibilities."] Maine is one of the least infested states, so any waterbody in any other state has to be seen as a serious threat. **It is alarming that since LAON started its CBI program in 2014, the number of infested lakes in Maine has grown from 23 to 30.** Please be aware of the status of all waterbodies you visit and if any are infested, be extra thorough with your inspection. (You can see Maine's known infested waterbodies at <https://www.maine.gov/dep/water/invasives/invasivesmap2020.pdf>. When you have a visitor or renter that brings a watercraft, please be sure that it is inspected before getting into one of our lakes.

Whenever leaving or entering any lake, stream, or river, it is critical that boaters inspect all parts of their boat and trailer for any plants, and that they remove any plant fragment. This includes items inside boats, such as anchors, anchor chains, lines, and fishing gear. During the 2018 season, one of our inspectors found a fishing line with both milfoil and a zebra mussel on it. That was a huge double save.

The phrase to remember from the State Department of Environmental Protection is “**Clean, Drain, Dry.**” That means boaters need to **clean** off any debris, plant fragments, mud, or anything else that should not be on your boat. To prevent inadvertently transporting an invasive in trapped water, plugs should be removed to let all trapped water **drain**, including emptying all wells. Draining should occur far enough away so that no drained water can flow directly back into a waterbody. Even small fragments of an invasive plant or its seeds can infest another waterbody. Milfoil fragments can live for many days, dry out, and be revived when carried back into a lake. The zebra mussel is especially troubling. Young mussels are tiny, almost invisible. They can live on surfaces for many days. Letting boats **dry** for up to 5 days is recommended, but sometimes difficult to do. Alternatives would be to pressure wash the boat with water at least 140 degrees, or with a 10% chlorine solution. It is a lot to ask, but an infested lake would be a serious problem.

Jet skis are a particular concern because they trap more lake water internally than other watercraft, potentially transporting invasives between waterbodies. If you can, flush it with fresh water between uses. If not, briefly running the engine should remove trapped water and any invasives within it. If doing this when arriving, ensure the water cannot drain into the lake. Check with the manufacturer to see how long you can run the engine with it out of water.

So far, Norway’s lakes have remained clear of invasive species, but any fragment could change that. We must all remain vigilant because addressing any infestation would be incredibly difficult and expensive. Let’s enjoy our lakes and keep them healthy together.