

The main focus of the conference was:
Managing Aquatic Invasive Species in Michigan's Inland Lakes

Tom Alwin from the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality opened the conference with a little background on invasive species in Michigan. Zebra mussels were first reported in Lake St. Clair in 1988. Their discovery prompted the formation of the of two groups; the Michigan Aquatic Nuisance Management Plan and the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative. Basically these groups provided resources for the public to contact in the event that a problem was detected. The work of these two groups consisted of cataloguing locations and types of new invasive species in the state. It took years to figure out how invasive species were getting into the state and how they moved around in the environment. Following that, it took many more years to know what if anything could be done about them. Acting to prevent the entry of additional aquatic or terrestrial problems from entering the ecosystem is an ongoing effort. Monitoring became the standard practice for finding new organisms and is still considered very important in managing invasive species. Control of existing invasives is difficult and sometimes impossible. Some success using beetles specific to purple loosestrife is an example of a biological control. Spotting new invasives before they become a problem is the best way to avoid uncontrolled infestation.

Mr. Alwin discussed having volunteers monitor boats at launch sites as an effective method to spot milfoil and inform boaters about how they could help keep the lake free from problems. He also talked about boat wash stations which in most cases are paid for by the lake associations. Given that boat ramps are a primary source of new invasive species, one participant asked how their lake could get the DNR to close some of the ramps on their lake because that was where most of the milfoil was found, ie. introduced to the lake. The answer was the DNR won't close any boat ramps.

After the general session there were several breakout sessions.

Breakout one: Swimmer's itch. Wayne Swallow gave a life history of swimmer's itch in lakes of Michigan. His main interest was in producing a cream that could be applied before getting in the lake. He has one in the testing phase which may be available in the next few years. Mr. Swallow spent the next hour outlining the Higgins Lake program for reducing swimmer's itch. They began by trapping mergansers on the lake. They continued to do this until they could no longer get a license to do it. Trapping birds was effective in reducing the incidence of swimmer's itch, but it didn't eliminate it. Once they stopped, the swimmer's itch returned, although at a lesser amount. Another method tried was oiling merganser eggs which kills them. Mr. Swallow mentioned that he thought other birds and snails could be hosts to the flatworm.

Mr. Swallow supplied us with a few interesting details about swimmer's itch. An onshore wind will increase the number of cercaria (swimmer's itch) in the water near shore. Spending more time in infested water will increase chances of a skin reaction. He mentioned that only 2% of the snails are infected with Schistosomiasis. He suggested collecting a snail, placing it in a dish of lake water and waiting for the cercaria to emerge. These can then be viewed under a microscope.

The website <http://swimmersitch.questionpro.com> provides a questionnaire that any lake resident can fill out detailing their experience with swimmer's itch.

Breakout two: Clean Boats, Clean Water Program. Beth Clawson, the Clean Boats, Clean Water

Program Coordinator outlined their program. She helps interested lake associations set up volunteer programs to monitor boats at boat ramps. Her experience suggested that getting more people involved in monitoring would help a lake in a number of ways. It would make more people aware of the problem of introducing invasives to the lake, it would lighten the load on each person, and it would benefit the lake. She thinks that volunteers continue to help for about 18 months. To keep volunteers motivated longer, she suggested praising them a lot, making them feel valued and part of a group of like-minded lake residents.

Breakout three: Jo Latimore, PhD, aquatic ecologist at MSU. Dr. Latimore demonstrated how to use a plant key. We then tried to identify several aquatic plants. The website MISIN.msu.edu can be used on a cell phone as an aid in identifying invasive aquatic plants. She then outlined how to do a plant survey on a lake.

Breakout four: Kevin Cronk, Monitoring and Research Director for Tip of the Mitt. Mr. Cronk's talk covered invasive species and what if anything can be done about them. Invasives destroy the environment for fishing and recreation. In addition, he mentioned that type E botulism which can kill birds has been traced back to zebra mussels. When quagga mussels invade a lake, the zebra mussels disappear. Quagga mussels are similar to zebra mussels but are larger. There is nothing that can be done to control either of these mussels. Preventing invasives from entering a lake is best. Controlling milfoil in lakes is expensive, time consuming and somewhat effective. Spotting it early and blanketing it seems to work the best.

In summary, I learned that invasive species are here to stay. New ones are always coming in, although the presentation on new species was canceled. Prevention is the only method of keeping invasives out of the lake. Once they become established, the only thing you can do is "manage" them. Adding an additional boat ramp will increase the chances of introducing milfoil, quagga mussels, round gobies and others to the lake. A robust volunteer program to monitor boats entering the lake will help. Concerned permanent lake citizens can write to the zoning board, their state senators and congress people expressing their thoughts on the negative aspects of a new DNR boat ramp at Douglas Lake.

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