

# CPONW concerned about zebra mussels

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Editor

The threat of Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) such as zebra mussels is still very much a real threat to northern waterways in Manitoba. Riding Mountain National Park's Clear Lake has unfortunately been exposed to zebra mussels and have had to take drastic measures of not allowing any watercraft on that lake, so they can try to determine and control the spread.

"The decision by the federal government to ban all public watercraft in Clear Lake this year was a bold move but was important to allow park staff to undertake further testing to confirm the presence or absence of zebra mussels in the lake," said Citizens Protecting Our Northern Waterways (CPONW) President Chris Smith. "Of note, this additional recent testing confirmed the presence of adult zebra mussels at the boat launch area at Clear Lake that will result in further actions.

"Fortunately, most lakes in northern Manitoba remain zebra mussel-free based on current monitoring information. If zebra mussels get deposited

and populate one of our waterbodies, unwanted changes to the aquatic ecosystem, a build-up of zebra mussels on infrastructure such as water intake lines and a build-up of dead zebra mussels on our beaches can be expected.

"Since most of our lakes are highly connected, a major concern is if zebra mussels show up in lakes in the upper watershed, lakes downstream are at a high risk of being invaded because the microscopic larvae get carried downstream with the current," said Smith. "For this reason, watercraft that have been in waterways known to have zebra mussels need to be inspected and decontaminated at one of the provincial watercraft inspection stations. In addition, to help prevent the spread from one lake to another, it is very important that all owners of watercraft clean, drain and dry their watercraft and gear when they leave any waterbody."

There is only one watercraft inspection station that is close to The Pas and there is a need for more stations to be set up and staffed properly.

"Currently, the only inspection station

that is set up daily, although hours vary, in northern Manitoba is on Highway 10 just south of Clearwater Lake," said Smith. "Unfortunately, due to staffing challenges, the station at Grand Rapids on Highway 6 is only operating periodically and is serviced by the new mobile Watercraft Inspection Station. This is concerning."

CPONW has still been adamantly focused on educating the public about the threat of AIS and is still working alongside the provincial government to monitor lakes in the area.

"Our public awareness focus has been to interact with people face-to-face at local trade shows and outdoor events and to share information," said Smith. "We have also installed signs along Highway 10 north of The Pas and south of Ponton on Highway 6, as well as various boat launches. We endeavour to make our messages short but informative.

"In addition, our group is collaborating with the provincial government by placing zebra mussel sampling plates in several northern lakes as part of the provincial monitoring program for early de-

tection. If zebra mussel larvae get introduced into one of these lakes, they will attach to these samplers which will trigger further action by the Province in terms of a rapid response process."

Lately, the Province released an AIS Prevention Plan, which CPONW was a part of in providing information from their perspective on how to prevent the spread of zebra mussels.

"We are a member of the Manitoba Aquatic Invasive Advisory Forum and provided input into the plan," said Smith.

"Although we provided several comments, the primary focus of our input related to the inspection stations expressing the need for the provincial government to explore alternate approaches to running these stations, particularly under-served stations such as the one at Grand Rapids.

"We offered strong support for the mobile watercraft inspection initiative to augment the established stations and are pleased the first mobile station is now operational.

"The plan is comprehensive and provides the framework for the AIS program that will prove to be

successful by implementing the actions identified in the plan," said Smith. "We also feel it would be beneficial for the Province to produce shorter companion documents that focus on key elements of the plan.

"From our perspective elements that focus on public outreach, what people can do themselves to help prevent the spread, in combination with a strong and effective Inspection and decontamination program are instrumental in preventing the spread of zebra mussels and other AIS.

"A strong and expanded public outreach program and actions to address the issues related to the inspection and decontamination program are important actions that should flow out of this plan," said Smith. "Of note, a recent report from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans outlined the results of AIS inspections undertaken at the Ontario and Manitoba border in June. This report documented that 25 percent of the watercraft inspected were not compliant with Clean-Drain-Dry requirements, and five boats were found to be carrying zebra mussels. This highlights

the important need for enhanced public awareness."

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