

New Awareness Could Be Solution To Minnesota's Invasives

Any time the word “crisis” is in a headline, prepare for the Minnesota Legislature to over-react and try to solve the crisis of the day by passing laws with unintended consequences.

Remember in politics, it is never a good idea to waste a crisis to gain the favor of the general public. This is not good government, it is a bad way to respond to long-term serious issues and this article will be written to make you think about options and solutions in our current battle with invasive species. There is little doubt they are slowly transforming the ecosystem of our state. When the information in this article is exposed to the right people and groups, Minnesota may be the first state in the nation to develop a blueprint of successfully taking on the invasive challenge. I must apologize in advance for the length of this story, once I got started, I felt telling the whole story was important.

Right now, Sportsmen of Minnesota who hunt and fish make-up only 34% of the total population of our state. This minority of the population is in a pot of water getting hotter and hotter. Because we “love our state” the Legislature passes laws so we must go along with the law because “you love your state” like lambs to the slaughter, we willingly give away our rights to Hunt and Fish in Minnesota.

Don't think for a moment the Minnesota DNR is not aware of this, but why are they silent? For sure they say to the public they are here to help, but the layers and layers of new employees they have hired to enforce unenforceable laws all work very hard to promote and keep their jobs. We can't blame them for that... They are unintentionally supporting the goals of the anti-fishing and anti-hunting groups. I visited a metro county park access with only five parking spots but had two inspectors to greet me. I comment that this must be quite the lake to merit two inspectors. The two college age guys were very open about the fact that the Parks district gets money from the DNR and they need to spend it, and sitting here all by yourself for the day gets very boring, so they have two to keep each other company!

This story is written, to try to expose the facts and to give solid solutions to a problem that shows no signs of abating if we continue our current path, the rights of Sportsman to enjoy our state are being limited under the false belief that not using the resource will solve the problem of spreading invasives.

In writing this story I was shocked with the lack of knowledge our legislature and even our DNR has for problem solving and I am here to show you the problems AND to show you solutions to those problems. Maybe we can ultimately get someone in the Legislature to author a bill to revoke the Invasives Species laws we have now. And to establish a new, long-term action plan for invasives that will not restrict sportsmen from enjoying the great outdoors.

Let's set the stage....Who is to blame for this mess? The answer is not easy to put a finger on. Sure, it was the Fish and Wildlife officials on the national and state levels who were aware and did nothing to stop boats from bringing in a wide variety of invasives into our ecosystem, but we can't blame all of them on just that. While the press focuses on the crisis with Zebra Mussels and Eurasian Milfoil, it is the common carp that has done more damage to our sport fisheries in this state than any invasive to date. Slowly they have spread to every part of our state, without the help of those heartless sportsmen. Where is the press on one of our oldest and biggest threats to our lakes? Most people today don't even realize the carp is a bad fish anymore, because the press has other fish to fry with the general public, the common carp has become just another fish in Minnesota.

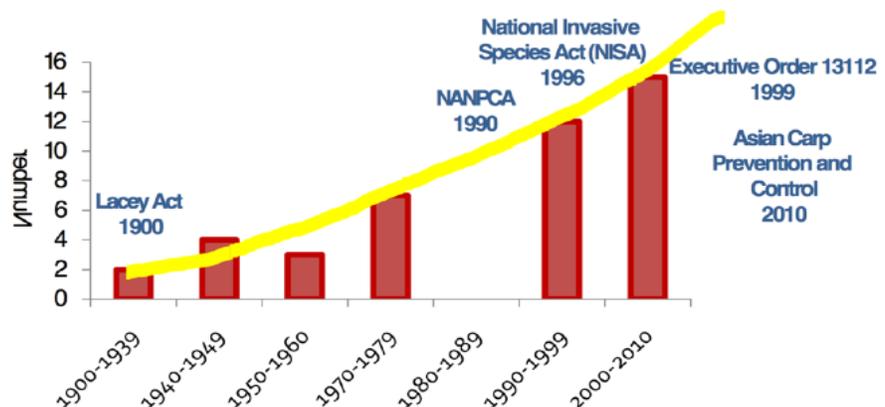
We cannot point fingers at the lack of regulations to prevent such problems, the regulations exist. In many ways, it is the landscape of the modern world we live in... invasives come, and are here to stay. Remember, not all invasives have the image of death and destruction like carp. Pheasants, turkeys and salmon are not native to this state, but they are a few we enjoy.

To keep things simple, the bullet has left the gun by the time we hear about a new invasive. Did you know there are 180 lesser known invasives in the great lakes today? The key fact and one I will keep repeating over and over again to anyone who will listen, we CANNOT stop the spread of invasives. No one has EVER stopped them. We cannot put the genie back in the bottle, in the end; they will take their place in our new Minnesota landscape.

This is the important thing to remember about the CRISIS or the WAR as some put it against invasives, they want you to believe that increased restrictions on human activity now will magically put that genie back in the bottle...It will not, but as I have already stated, in politics, you never want to waste a good crisis to legitimize a growth in government.

Here is a chart done by Dr. Chris Waters, a regional Aquaculture Extension Specialist for this part of the country. It shows the rapid increase in federal laws to limit the spread by focusing on changing human behavior around our

US public laws and acts for invasive species



resources. I think everyone will agree these increased laws have not yielded the success they wanted. It is only natural for law makers to make even more laws as they have in Minnesota and expect different results. Let's look at who is fanning the flames of this crisis to better understand why the media claims it to be a "crisis".

It begins with lake associations who for years have tried and failed to find a way to keep non-home owners off their lakes. For years, they have struggled to get the government behind them to limit lake access, they start by limiting parking, or how or when you can use a lake to discourage people from coming there. These "concerned associations" are now jumping for joy because they have been given the legal right to control their lake access by the Minnesota State Legislature... The unintended consequences of this law passed during a manufactured crisis is a dream come true to cities and communities wanting to close-off access to their local lakes and it began only weeks after the law was passed! On a recent visit to Lake Waconia, an association inspector kept me off the lake because he did not see me put in my drain plug while I was waiting to launch my boat. In this case, he made-up his own version of the law and with clipboard in hand, recorded my license numbers and with this type of intimidation, I went to another lake.

There is no doubt the Sportsmen lost the PR battle with invasives and I'm sure if you asked 10 out of 10 non-sportsmen who even knew what a zebra mussel is, would tell you it was the "fishermen" who caused this problem in the first place! When was the last time you saw the benefits of zebra mussels in the headlines? A recent University of Wisconsin study revealed lakes contaminated with zebra mussels on average saw 10% higher property values than lakes without zebra mussels?

When a popular lake is discovered to be infested, it makes headlines.... And it is the fishermen who are labeled as the ones who knowingly and purposely brought these lake killing invasives into the ecosystem. The press and the Home Owners Associations are working hand in hand to keep the myth going and the DNR sits on the sidelines and says: "Tell us what you want us to do about it!" The answer from the Legislature is PLEASE save us from the destruction of our resource by these heartless fishermen.

So the DNR starts the dance. By law, they cannot limit access to the lakes, but if you give them a new law, they can find ways for the local cities to limit those who trailer a boat to those lakes. They hire vast teams of Invasive Species Prevention Coordinators and all their staffs who obviously want to keep their job, so they write press releases using words like WAR, CRISIS and it is your responsibility to STOP invasives.

Don't be surprised by all the "crisis" talk, this is what they were hired to do... the senior management at the DNR know they have zero chance of stopping anything, and the word "prevention" in their job title actually gives the impression to the general public they are actually working to prevent something.

After reading this article, please forward it to your family and friends so they understand why sportsmen are about to lose out big as the DNR sits on the sidelines asking: "What do you want us to do?" If the DNR was looking out for the Sportsmen and women of this state, they would be trying to slow down the runaway PR blitz against sportsmen and tell the public and our legislators the truth about invasives...

They would re-name their “Prevention” Coordinator titles to ones of that say it like it is... they are: “Invasive Management Coordinators”

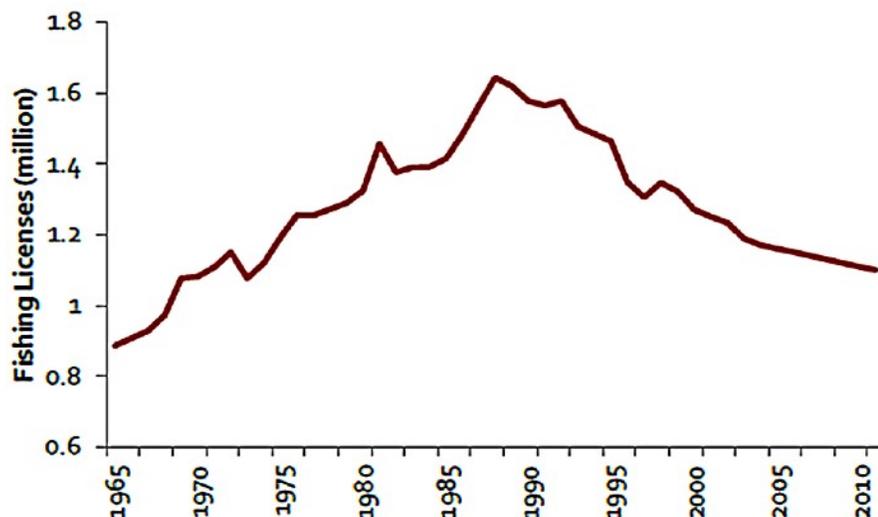
Case in point, ask anyone at the DNR if ANY invasive species has EVER been stopped from finding their permanent place in our ecosystem once introduced? Then ask if ANY OTHER state has been able to wipe-out any invasive species once rooted in a widespread ecosystem? I hate to tell everyone this news, but they have NEVER been stopped! Even Jay Rendall, the Minnesota Invasive Species “Prevention” Coordinator, stated at a conference a few years back about invasives: “These are not reversible actions.”

So, if the “experts” in our state or others cannot find a way to stop the spread of invasives, why is this story being ignored? This is not some conspiracy theory, just an unfortunate fact of nature, follow the money.

State of Ohio’s Sea Grant Zebra Mussel control program back in the early 90’s was armed with decontamination systems at boat ramps just like they are trying to do here... but that effort failed and millions of dollars were wasted... The Minnesota DNR knows this, they know we cannot stop the spread, but it does mean more money and more staff. Take for example the once proposed 20 million dollar fish barrier on the Mississippi River to prevent the migration of the Asian carp and the \$250,000 dollar a year cost to maintain it. These barriers have proven not to work, and in high water years, the fish will just swim over the dam! The obvious solution to the Minnesota legislature was to limit fishermen access by simply closing the upper locks to boating, when the spring floods came, the carp migrated over the dam but even knowing this fact of nature, the locks remained closed anyway! ACTION must be taken, even if it is shorted sighted or wrong. Compromises MUST be made to keep the public happy. What could 20 million dollars do to support innovative programs that make a difference? One can only assume the DNR is doing exactly what the public wants them to do... and that is to TRY to protect the resources of our great state. A noble goal, but why didn’t anyone ask the one key question BEFORE the laws were passed or the money was spent? Has increased regulation helped in any state in the past? The answer is no, so the logical reasons the DNR does not tell the whole story is to make people feel good, to prevent legal action or to get more money. From the outside looking in, it appears the DNR is blaming Sportsmen for invasives, and this makes the non-sportsmen “feel good” about resource management. This anti-human activity in the woods or waters DOES effect hunter and fisherman participation by limiting access to waters or how waters

are enjoyed by the sportsman. It may seem hard to believe if you are a sportsmen. But there are groups that would be glad to see an end of hunting and fishing as we know it.

The DNR does what they are told by pressure from public



forums or laws even if the facts in the real world don't support the decision. For example:

Every season the DNR stocks walleye in lakes that don't support natural walleye reproduction. Why? Well it is the public that demands walleye, so the DNR is told to give us walleye. The DNR does what they are told even if the facts on the ground don't support the decision to make people feel good.

Many of these demands we make on our DNR are not logical or practical, it is purely their desire to keep sportsmen happy, and so they have a reason to get more funds to spend. Don't think for a moment the DNR is not a political animal.

You have to ask yourself who is running the show when the DNR will ticket you for not having the correct decals on your boat trailer for not taking special training class every three years... The answer is US! The DNR enforcement team does exactly what they are told... The poorly written law will require them to write the ticket. I understand this completely, but what many people fail to grasp, is that it was sportsmen who let senseless laws get passed because "we all want to protect our natural resources." The good news is that since we wrote the laws, we can also repeal them.

Just ask yourself, what happens in a few years when it will become an even bigger crisis and we must.... for the good of our lakes and resources, take even bolder steps to stop sportsmen from spreading invasives. Stop and think about what I just said. And remember, I'm telling you there is NOTHING we can do to stop the spread of invasives, but the mainstream public feel sportsmen are the cause of the "Crisis" so even stricter laws MUST be the outcome. Once you start down this road, it is a scary scenario for sportsmen's rights.

I bet this question was never asked when the new laws were passed: "What if this does not work?"

Please contact your state legislator and tell him or her to wake-up and help our state address this issue the right way, before all our rights are slowly taken away. We must get the word out on invasives and tell our legislators to look in a different direction for solutions, not by passing more restrictive laws with no proven benefits. Please ask them to sit back and try to better understand what we are up against to create a long-term action plan to take on these challenges the good old American Way...

There are solutions to take this challenge on, although they seem simple on the front side, they are not. This is going to be a long-term, ongoing struggle to protect what we love so much here in Minnesota.

Let me explain. We need to re-think and become pro-active. Like a team of forest fighters who trying to gain control of a fire, they know hitting it head-on will have little impact, it is best to try to control the fire to minimize damage and expense in getting the fire under control.

Let's look at the PR nightmare we are up against with educating the general public, As I have mentioned, there are over 180 invasives in the great lakes alone and hundreds more spreading on land!

Name an invasive or non-native species we have been able to eliminate once established in our ecosystem. Lamprey? Carp? Rusty Crawfish? Curley Pond weed? Purple Loose Strife? Smallmouth bass? Spiny water flea? Zebra Mussel? Goby? English sparrow - Emerald Ash Bore? And the list goes on and on.

The answer.. is NONE! So where do we start if we know the battle has never been won? The answer first starts with knowing our limitations and that means the best we can hope for at this time is a tie. I mean the best we can hope for is to control the situation not eliminate it. Stopping invasives is impossible. Stopping the spread of invasives is also impossible. Sure, if you spend millions and restrict all outdoor activities, you will slow it down, but like with the forest fire, the invasives are coming in ever increasing numbers and we cannot spend enough or restrict enough human activity to have any lasting effect in the outcome. Taking on the flames head-on is not logical, practical or a long-term action plan. The public must be told these facts and they must be told the action plan is to stay ahead of these ongoing issues. We need to start an aggressive PR campaign at the DNR to support this story and to push for the agenda of "CONTROLLING" not "STOPPING" invasives.

Just because "it feels good" to pick a weed off your trailer does NOT prevent the spread of weeds while two million geese are moving from lake to lake every day without a care in the world. DON'T get me wrong... all is NOT lost. We don't want to give up the battle, we just want the world to know that coming up with a draw in this battle, would actually be a huge victory...

Action for the sake of action:

I'm sure many Twin Cities Residents remember the Auto Emission Tests for your vehicles back in the 90's? Again, it was an air pollution "crisis" to reduce carbon monoxide for cleaner air... everyone wants cleaner air, so we should pass a law and have testing sites around the metro area and demand people have tune-ups. As it was stated at the time: This program means we are all doing our part to protect the quality of the air we breathe. The law was passed during a "crisis" to make people feel good.

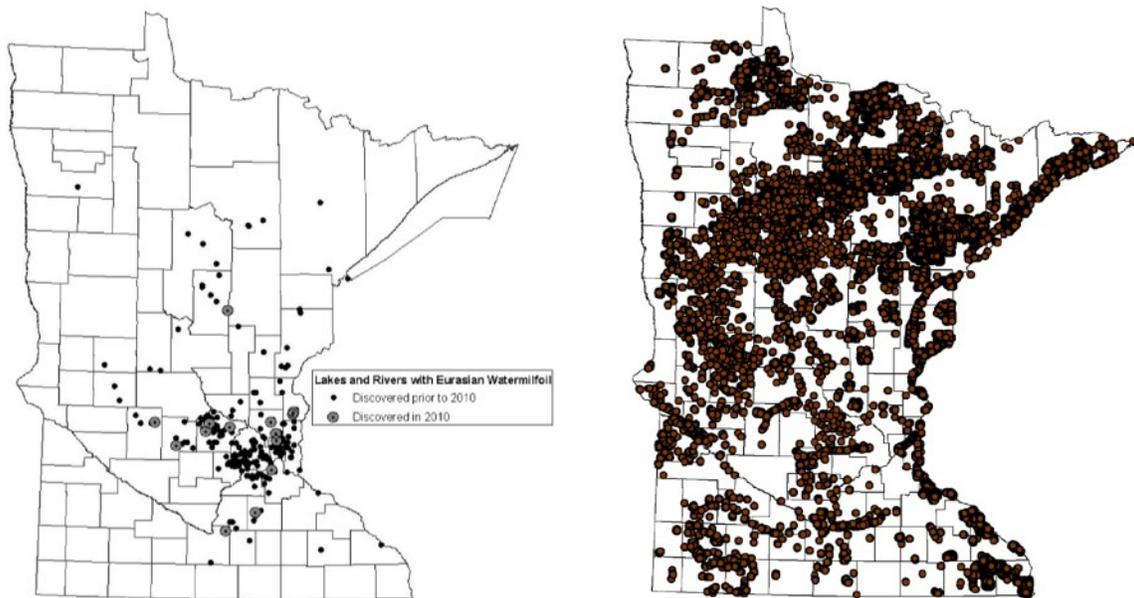
As we know now, it cost the taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars and the inspection program ended with little fanfare when it was discovered it had no effect on air quality.

History is a great teacher, but time and time again we fall into the trap of knee jerk reactions to solve long-term problems. Did you know back in July of 2015 every boat trailer on the road in Minnesota was required to have a sticker on it and you needed to take a class and pay a fee in order to get the sticker? The strange law passed in the heat of the "crisis" in 2012, but it was worded so it did not go into effect until 2015. Then they had to re-write the law as it proved unenforceable as a law and anti-business since every boat, even non-residents passing through Minnesota were required to have this stamp on their trailer. We will be forced as boaters to jump through more and more hoops until someone realizes it has no effect in stopping anything. Many states with invasives have tried, Minnesota was not the first, and all have failed.

Today the challenge is not stopping but controlling the infestations.

To once again stress the nature of the challenge ahead of us is to look at what is happening right now.

Here is some information I found in an annual report from the DNR on what is currently going on with invasives around the state. In the report they are also worried about an aquatic plant call Purple Loosestrife. How it got here is not important, what is important is seeing how it spreads naturally with little human influence. In this chart, you see the DNR's most recent



report on infestation sites around the state. Although Purple Loosestrife has been in our ecosystem for many more years than Eurasian Milfoil, noticed something very interesting...

Mother Nature finds a way. Note the maps of infestations of invasives in Minnesota, one shows Purple Loose Strife which is spread almost entirely by nature (right). The other shows infestation of lakes by Eurasian Milfoil (left). Note how similar the pattern is for the infestations of both plants, but one is blamed almost entirely on sportsman for spreading (Eurasian Milfoil) while the other spreads

Here is the same map with Eurasian Milfoil infestations. The pattern is surprisingly similar and if you project another 20 years of Eurasian Milfoil presence on this graphic, you end up with a nearly complete duplication of the current infestation level of Purple Loosestrife. I do this to stress a point about the spreading of invasives. According to the DNR, Purple Loosestrife is spread with little human support, while Eurasian Milfoil has been blamed almost exclusively on boaters. Ask yourself how one aquatic plant is spread 100% by humans and the other with almost zero human influence can both end up with nearly the same result?

The answer is one that many people may not want to hear, but it only confirms a fact that we already know about invasives, Nature finds a way... The old moss back snapping turtle you see slowly crossing the road moves to a new lake and takes with it the invasives living on its

back... The point is, once they are introduced into the ecosystem, like the carp, history has shown us it is impossible to stop.

So what is the action plan?

History has also shown that sportsmen fight hard to protect their resource so, I suggest instead of blaming sportsmen as the cause, sportsmen should be challenged to find their own solutions. It is vast human resource of manpower ready and willing to help the resource...



Remember, it was the sportsmen who started the “catch and release” craze to improve our fisheries. It was not some government ad campaign who demanded it; it was the Sportsmen who realized it made good sense to protect their resource.

What is so crazy about the current wave of invasives is the way the press releases demonize the Sportsmen of this state by projecting to the general, non-sporting public that invasives are the sole responsibility of those dreaded fishermen and hunters.

Look at how the DNR is funded. Look at the money generated from licenses, user fees, and excise taxes on every piece of fishing and hunting gear. This money comes back to fund the DNR to improve our resource. Sportsmen of this state contribute 90 million dollars a year to the DNR budget and with this fund over 90% of all the fish and wildlife projects around the state, so it is upsetting to see the sportsmen as the bad guys in this whole invasive scenario.

One suggestion is for the DNR to develop a strike force to allow local sportsmen’s groups the ability to cut through red tape to get chemicals or purchase machines on a 50/50 basis so the local groups can help invest their time and money even more and supply the manpower to use the equipment or to spread the chemicals. Allow the local groups to take an active part to raise money to keep invasives in their community under control. There is an ARMY of free workers eager to support our state, IF the state can find a way around their political games to let this happen. It is amazing to me that we cannot mobilized local Sportsmen’s clubs to buy more beetles that eat only Purple Loosestrife for example, or be willing to put a bounty on all carp?

This brings me to the next big step in invasive management.

Most sportsmen or legislators are not even aware that over 90% of the Zebra Mussels have died off by some natural cause in the Mississippi River and experts cannot agree on why And it has been 15 years since the first die-offs! Where is the outcry from the public for answers? For the fifteen years this has been going on, if Zebra Mussels are such a disruptive force in nature, why don’t we have any answers? Clearly the system is broke.

Letting the Minnesota DNR do more research or pay the U of M 3.8 million dollars to do more “research” spanning several years for sure is simply a waste of time and money. I can predict the U of M will request millions more over time as well, all for sake of “feel good” research. I can bet you the money was given to the U with nothing more than the hope of finding something useful “somewhere down the line”.

This is the wrong approach...

We need to motivate people to get results in a time sensitive way. One idea might be to have funds set aside from our State Lottery proceeds for funding a series of million dollar contests to challenge Universities nation-wide and also open it up to private companies and individuals to find control methods for our various invasive problems. Unleashing the creative resources of our own concerned population would let a solution come about far faster and in the end, we pay only for results... trust me on this, research on Zebra Mussels has been going on around the world for 75 years!

Like the prize for the first to fly across the Atlantic or the first car to drive across America. Many said at the time it was impossible. It was not the government who made the impossible.... Possible, but people who were able to look outside the box to find solutions and the incentive of a million dollars... If they find the solution, approved by the DNR of course. This concept of asking for help and offering a reward will make some amazing things happen.

Repealing the current invasive species laws and inspections and replacing it with a long-term management budget is just common sense. For example, it might cost America five million dollars annually to control the lamprey in the Great Lakes, but it protects a BILLION-dollar fishing industry. I ask you is this a wise investment of money? It has proven to be a huge success story in how to control an invasive species. In this battle with the lamprey, this is just a draw... not a win, but it protects us from the total collapse of the Great Lakes Fishery. In 2012 the Minnesota DNR spends about 7.2 million annually on total invasive issues state-wide and only 25% of that goes to management /control of invasives.

We do have some containment and control options now that could be more cost effectively deployed if local sportsman’s groups are brought in to supply free labor. Remember, it is unrealistic to say the words “stop” or “eliminate” when we are talking invasives... the best we can hope for is long term control...

So in conclusion, let’s keep it simple, think of the three R’s

Return the respect to Sportsmen of this state who love it so dearly

Repeal, A critical first step is to re-write the invasive laws we have on the books so nothing will not limit sportsman’s access to our resources.

Rethink the current way we confront invasives to find ways to control the infestations with the support of the Sportsmen of our state and stop blaming them.

Make no mistake we are at war with invasives, but we are in a war we cannot and will never win, so it is best we accept this challenge now and find a way to minimize their impact for generations to come.

Finding a path to proper resource management need not be rocket science. It was not the sportsmen who caused this problem, but it could very well be the Sportsmen of this great state who rise-up to get this issue under control.

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