

Aquatic invasive species and you

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The following guest commentary was written by Jennifer DeMoss, communications director at Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council.

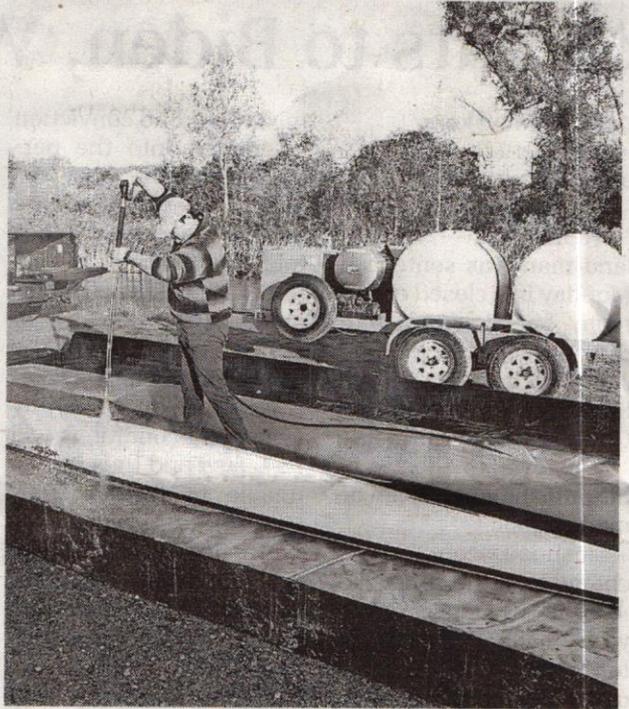
On a crisp early fall morning, a Chevy Silverado hauling an unusually shaped trailer looms into the boat launch parking area. There's no boat behind the truck. Instead, there's gear designed to support water quality and help boaters enjoy their time on Northern Michigan's lakes. Atop the bright blue trailer are balanced two white, opaque plastic containers, one filled with hot water, with a motor in a black metal box perched behind them. The driver parks, and she and her passenger roll a large rubber mat out onto the parking lot. As more trucks and trailers enter the parking lot, the pair ask them to park their boats on the mat. They clean the boats with a blast of hot water and then send the boaters and anglers off to enjoy their day on the lake. Boats leaving the water get the same treatment, all to prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species (AIS) from lake to lake. This is the Watershed Council's Mobile Boat Washing Station, cheerfully dubbed MOBO by our staff.

MOBO was a huge success this year, in part due to grants from the Charlevoix County Community Foundation and the Petoskey-Harbor Springs Area Community Foundation that funded the new-to-us truck that hauled the station all over our service area. The Michigan Invasive Species Grant Program and the U.S. Forest Service were also generous sponsors of the program. Our staff and interns, with the help of volunteers and lake associations, washed boats on 10 lakes in our service area plus a few further afield. We washed 279 boats, including 153 kayaks at this year's Paddle Antrim festival. We interacted with over 800 boaters and anglers, passing out literature on the hazards of aquatic invasive species, which can outcompete native species and cause enormous economic and ecological harm. We washed over 400% more boats this year than last year, and we're proud of our work to keep our lakes healthy.

Our work preventing the spread of AIS depends on the people who use local waterways. That happens to be quite a lot of people. The Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) reported that, in 2018, Michigan was home to around 4 million boaters. With the pandemic pushing people towards outdoor recreation, boat dealers have been regularly running out of inventory. Last year, 21,024 residents and 202,517 nonresidents received fishing licenses in Charlevoix, Cheboygan, Antrim, and Emmet counties. At our MOBO events, we washed only a small fraction of the boats that hit the water this summer.

That's not to say that the Watershed Council's efforts were for nothing. We aren't capable of washing every boat, and education is a huge part of our mission. Every boater who learns about cleaning, draining, and drying their boat is a triumph. Every time someone acts on the law to remove aquatic species before leaving a boat launch, we are grateful. Removing the growing threat of AIS has to take place even after our bright blue MOBO trailer has left the lot, and for good reason.

There is an enormous investment in water recrea-



Water resources education coordinator Eli Baker uses the Watershed Council's Mobile Boat Washing Station to clean a kayak prior to Paddle Antrim at Ellsworth River Park. The spray of hot water can dislodge aquatic invasive species and prevent their spread between water bodies. PROVIDED PHOTO/ JENNIFER DEMOSS

tion at the state level that AIS threaten to decimate. The DNR estimates the value of state-sponsored boating access sites at over \$1,000,000,000. Aquatic invasive species, such as Eurasian watermilfoil that blankets lake bottoms and tangles in boat propellers, threatens boating and other water recreation. Thick mats of this invasive watermilfoil kill off native vegetation that fish rely on for food. And that's just one invasive species. A study by the Anderson Economic Group estimated that the cost of controlling AIS in the Great Lakes region exceeds \$100,000,000 annually. Aquatic invasive species affect tourism, water intake pipes at power plants, industrial shipping, shoreline property owners, and more. Citizens bear the burden in the forms of increased water and energy costs. Tax revenues go towards helping with the devastation that AIS cause individuals and businesses.

That's why the invasive species we're washing off of boats with MOBO are more than just a Watershed Council problem. They threaten our livelihoods, our recreation opportunities, and our pocketbooks. We need the help of all boaters, anglers, and other recreationists to keep our waters healthy. Clean, drain, and dry your boats and trailers to prevent the spread of AIS. Don't dump your bait into a lake or stream. Help us protect what you love, from your favorite swimming hole to your bank account.

For more questions about AIS or our Mobile Boat Washing Station, contact the Watershed Council at info@watershedcouncil.org or (231) 347-1181. Visit www.watershedcouncil.org/aquatic-invasive-species for more information on AIS.