

BEST PRACTICES



Keep Hitch Hikers Off Your Boots

Tips for Controlling the Spread of Aquatic Nuisance Species

Like most Pacific Northwest dwellers, Stream Team volunteers are ready to get outside once the days get longer and the temperature starts to rise. It's time to get out the kayak, the hiking boots or maybe the fishing pole.

Wait just a minute though...before you get your boots wet! For many years now, boaters have been required to clean their boats and motors to stop the spread of invasive weeds like Eurasian water milfoil. With new threats of several non-native invasive species, recreationists are also being asked to make sure that they decontaminate their boots and gear. Decontaminating your gear is hugely important to prevent the spread of aquatic invasive or nuisance species.



What's the big deal? Both aquatic plant and animal invasive species are a serious threat to the biological diversity of our streams, lakes and coastal waters. Humans have carried plants, animals and diseases with them since they first began to travel. With the ease of modern travel, the rate of invasive species introduction has increased dramatically, costing billions in control and eradication efforts worldwide.

Non-native invasive species spread rapidly in new environments where there are no natural controls. Many of the invasive species, as well as fungi and diseases, are accidentally introduced as they "hitch hike" on other plants and animals, or in some cases, on your boat and even on the soles of your boots! Invasive species out-compete native species, disrupting natural food chains and changing aquatic systems.

One of the most harmful hitch hiking species we are faced with locally is the New Zealand mudsnail. It is considered to be a highly invasive threat to fresh and brackish water environments. Since the mudsnail is tiny (less than 6mm), it is easily transported unknowingly on the soles of your boots. It also reproduces asexually (all by itself) at a rapid rate, and population densities easily reach 100,000 per square meter. This aquatic hitch hiker can devastate stream ecosystems and fish production in a few short years.

Tips To Prevent the Spread of Aquatic Nuisance Species

- Never release live pets, plants, bait or seafood products into the natural environment. This includes aquariums and terrariums.
- Clean your boat before you float! Clean, drain and dry any watercraft after use—this prevents hitch hiking of any aquatic invasive species including fish and shellfish diseases, plants and other animals.
- Decontaminate fishing gear and boots.

How to Decontaminate Boots and Gear

- Thoroughly brush-off any debris from waders, boots and equipment that came in contact with stream, lake or salt water, then place into a bag.
- Drain any water used to clean equipment back into the water body from which it came.
- Keep your gear bagged until you are able to either wash it in hot water (140F) for at least 5 minutes or freeze overnight.
- Other decontamination methods use highly toxic chemical solutions for soaking boots and gear. If using harmful chemicals, remember to dump waste water into the sanitary sewer and not into streams, wetlands, storm drains or septic systems.



For more information, visit www.wdfw.wa.gov/species-habitat/ais. If you spot an aquatic invasive species (AIS) while you are out enjoying the outdoors, call 1-888-WDFW-AIS.

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