

## How Paddlers Can Help Protect Local Waters

by New York Sea Grant Launch Steward Kyle Teufel

Paddle sport enthusiasts can play a key role in early detection and intervention measures to slow the spread of aquatic invasive species before problem species negatively impact the local waterbody. With 712 miles of shoreline along Lake Ontario, and countless tributaries, water trails are plentiful for the registered non-motorized boaters who total approximately nine percent of the Great Lakes' boating community, according to the Great Lakes Commission.

Kayakers and canoeists experience local waters in a unique way. They enjoy their pastime close to the water, move slowly, and often are very familiar with the launch sites and trails that they frequent. This familiarity allows them a bit of an advantage for observing changes in the environment, such as the early arrival of a new aquatic invasive species (AIS).

The New York Sea Grant Launch Steward Program encourages all boaters to implement preventative steps to help slow the spread of AIS. By being aware of the invasive species that threaten frequented areas and taking steps to keep vessels clean, non-motorized boaters can aid in preserving the quality of our water resources for recreational users, fish and wildlife.

### Build & Share Your Knowledge of AIS

The ability to properly identify both native and invasive species equips boaters to address the AIS problem. For example, in 2012, Delaware County, NY, has an issue with the invasive algae *Didymo*, commonly called "rock snot." This microscopic algae can be found in even a droplet of water, indicating its ability to cling to anything, including boats, clothing, paddles and other equipment. It can remain viable for up to 40 days in damp conditions.

Ithaca, NY's, Cayuga Lake Inlet has Hydrilla, an extremely rapidly-growing and destructive plant. Hydrilla, like many aquatic plants, can spread through fragmentation, even a small leaf fragment. Knowing how to recognize invasive species that propagate this way, non-motorized boaters can avoid paddling through mats of the AIS and possibly spreading the invasive species further downstream.

Non-motorized boaters are also encouraged to more diligent about properly cleaning boats and gear before leaving waters in this and other areas.

*Photo: This kayaker helps with removing the AIS water chestnut from Oneida Lake. Photo: Nick Spera, NYSG*



## How Non-Motorized Boaters Can Help Slow the Spread of AIS

*To prevent the transfer of problem species from one body of water to another, paddlers can follow these simple watercraft inspection and cleaning practices.*

### Inspect & Clean

- Check boat (inside and out) and any equipment, e.g., paddles, helmets, and life jackets, for aquatic plant or animal matter. Clean equipment seams where debris is most likely to stick. Tiny plant fragments and microscopic organisms can be found aboard in small volumes, even a single droplet, of water.
- Wash and rinse away any mud equipment might carry.
- Properly disinfect and clean equipment; see tips recommended by "Stop Aquatic Hitchhikers!" ([www.protectyourwaters.net](http://www.protectyourwaters.net)), use 104-110° hot water; do not use bleach.



*AIS: Hydrilla; photo: Chris Evans, Bugwood.org*

### Drain & Dry

- Before leaving the area, empty all the water taken on while paddling. Flip boat and/or pull drain plug. Do this for even "seemingly" empty boats to ensure AIS are not later drained into a different watershed.
- After draining, towel dry the inside of the hull to quicken the drying process.
- If your boat will not enter a new body of water immediately, air drying is less labor-intensive. Depending on the humidity and where the boat is being stored, it may take 2-5 days for boat to completely dry.

### Check Everything

- Follow "Inspect & Clean, Drain & Dry" steps for all equipment, clothing, shoes, paddles, personal floatation devices/life jackets, kayak skirts, etc. before next use.

### Practice Proper Disposal of AIS:

- Dispose of unwanted debris and organisms from your boat in designated trash areas or NYSDEC Invasive Species Disposal Stations or on dry land away from vehicle traffic; location should be where debris will not runoff to reintroduce AIS into nearby water

### Report Findings:

- Report new invasive species you encounter to local authorities

### Learn More:

- New York Sea Grant - [www.nyseagrant.org/ais](http://www.nyseagrant.org/ais)
- New York Invasive Species Clearinghouse: [www.nyis.info](http://www.nyis.info)
- National Stop Aquatic Hitchhikers campaign: [www.protectyourwaters.net](http://www.protectyourwaters.net)
- What AIS threaten your area? Check <http://imapinvasives.org/nyimi/map>
- New York State Partnership for Regional Invasive Species
- New York State Department of Environmental Conservation: [www.dec.ny.gov](http://www.dec.ny.gov)



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