

Valley Angler

Aliens In The Water

by Bill Thompson

A few weeks ago I purchased a couple of one man pontoon boats. They are made by the Hobbie Company and are propelled through the water by rowing. I have only had them in the water a couple of times so far they have proved to be a lot of fun.

Shortly after I got them I had a couple of revelations. The first one was: "Where in the heck am I going to store them, (the boats), for the winter". I have more or less resolved the problem of storage; however it wasn't until I read an article in Trout magazine that I had the second revelation. Trout magazine is the official publication of Trout Unlimited, a national organization dedicated to the promotion and preservation of trout fishing. The article was about the nation wide problem of invasive species. It occurred to me that for the first time in many years I owned a water craft that was easily transported from one body of water to another. I was now part of the problem.

Anyone who as driven across the border into Maine in the last few years is probably noticed the large signs warning boaters to wash their boats before launching in Maine waters. The same type of sign is posted at most boat launches through out the state of New Hampshire. These signs are posted to warn boaters of the danger of transporting unwanted species from one body of water to another, the most notable being milfoil. My little boats are capable of doing the same thing as any larger craft. The fact is that I have been a menace long before I brought the boats. I am sure that some say that I have been a menace for some time now. The very act of wading a stream in felt soled wading shoes would be enough to spread some of these dangerous pests that have found their way into our water ways.

There are many different kinds of invasive species that are having a detrimental effect and they are not just a concern for fishermen. The list of biological aliens includes exotic weeds, insects, diseases, birds, mammals, and fish. These aliens are responsible for crop damage and loss of native species. The cost in dollars is staggering and the loss to our environment and native species is beyond comprehension. A great many of these species, as one might suspect, come from abroad. In today's world it is possible to transport almost anything overnight including these undesirable species. Consider the number of ships and aircraft arriving daily from abroad and it is easy to see how these hitch hikers come to our shores. However, accidental introduction is not the only reason behind the problem. The deliberate introduction by well meaning individuals has also contributed greatly to the problem. A short list of exotics that are most detrimental to fish include: the New Zealand Mudsail, Zebra Mussel, Snakeheads, Whirling Disease and Eurasian Water-Milfoil. You may also be surprised to learn that some species that are near and dear to our hearts can also be an invasive species if they are introduced to water other then their native habitat. Lake Trout, Atlantic Salmon, Bass and the Brook Trout are all having an adverse effect in some locations through out the country.

Take for instance the illegal introduction of Lake Trout into Yellowstone Lake in Yellowstone Park. Some well-meaning, but mis-guided individual or individuals stocked the lake with these non-native trout. The result has been a nearly 60% decline in the native Yellowstone Cutthroat trout despite an expensive and concerted effort to rid the lake of them. The decline of the Cutthroat has consequences far beyond the loss of a few fish. The entire eco-system from the grizzly bear on down is negatively effected. If you think this is a problem found only in Yellowstone Park consider the negative effect Lake Trout are having on nearby Sebago Lake in Maine. An even closer example of how “bucket biologists” can destroy a body of water one only has to go as far as Freedom’s Shaw Pond and see what has happened since Bass were introduced. All of us can have a roll in reversing this disturbing trend. First, know your fish and be able to identify any non-native species that may appear in you favorite fishing hole. Should you discover an out of place species contact the Fish and Game Department immediately. Do not release the pest, hold on to it so that the Department can positively identify it. Clean you gear thoroughly after each fishing trip. Especially wading boots and waders. Clean your boat, motor and trailer after each trip and before going to a new location. Drain all the water from live wells. Never try to play God and transplant fish or any other species. It is amazing how many fools just empty a bait bucket or worse yet an aquarium into a lake or pond. Be very careful when purchasing plants for your garden. Be aware of exotic species problems in your local area and do your part in helping keep them from spreading.

It is unlikely that this problem is going to go away soon, if ever, however we all can make a difference with some common sense and a willingness to pitch in and do what we can as individuals. We all live down stream!

See you on the river.