

AIS prevention continues with winter fishing

Hubbard County COLA

From Memorial Day through Labor Day, Hubbard County public boating accesses have aquatic invasive species (AIS) inspectors periodically on duty.

While inspectors are idle in the winter, the purpose of the program – to reduce the threat of spreading AIS, such as invasive plants or zebra mussels with their microscopic offspring – is ongoing. As such, rules and regulations that support the

inspection program are still in place, while others might change somewhat.



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For instance, moving water from one lake to another, especially from a lake with an existing AIS to a lake that is clean, is the basis for the law that requires removal of plugs and draining of livewells and motors before traveling with a boat.

During winter, the threat of moving water via boat doesn't exist. About the only potential this time of year is via bait bucket. For open water months, Minnesota regulations state: "If you chose to keep your bait when done fishing, you must exchange water in bait buckets with tap or bottled water prior to leaving any water body.

This rule does not apply, however, for people fishing through the ice. So, unless the lake in which you are fishing is infested with viral hemorrhagic septicemia (VHS) – Hubbard County does not have any – you can take your bait bucket from lake to lake without exchanging the water.

Just as in the open water season, it is not legal to bring in live minnows from another state.

Also consistent from open water to ice fishing is that you can't dump minnows in the water when you are done fishing.

An added concern in winter is anglers who dump or leave minnows behind on the ice, which isn't necessarily the same as putting live minnows in the water, but is considered littering. "Preferably, you would take them home and put them in the trash," noted Wade Massure, Park Rapids area fisheries supervisor for the Minnesota Department of Natural



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Top: Rules and best practices for protecting Hubbard County lakes from aquatic invasive species are just as important during the ice fishing season as in the open water months. **Bottom:** Minnows are involved in several ice fishing issues relating to the health and cleanliness of Hubbard County lakes.

Resources (DNR).

Trash on the ice, in general, Massure added, is an ongoing winter issue. He started his position in Park Rapids in February 2022 and said he has since received a number of calls relating to littering on the ice. "That just kind of surprised me that people were leaving trash on the ice," he said.

One other regulation that might apply more in winter relates to preserved smelt, which when thawed are often used for pike fishing. According to DNR regulations, because of VHS

concerns, you can use dead smelt that are preserved by a DNR permit holder using accepted methods known to make the VHS virus inactive. Freezing alone is not a sanctioned bait preservation method because it doesn't kill the VHS virus, according to the DNR website.

For more information or answers to other bait questions, contact Massure at 218-552-2317, or visit the DNR website at www.dnr.state.mn.us/regulations/fishing/index.html.

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This is the website for the MN DNR in the article: <https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/regulations/fishing/index.html>