New Illinois Campaign Highlights Importance of Invasive Species Prevention

Be A Hero—Transport Zero™ is a statewide campaign designed to raise awareness about how the public can help prevent the spread of invasive species. Over 180 non-native aquatic species have been introduced into the Great Lakes region, and some of these—zebra mussel, Eurasian watermilfoil, silver carp, and round goby—have pushed out native species and caused extensive economic and ecological damage in the Great Lakes and inland waters of Illinois. More aquatic invasive species (AIS) such as these lurk on the horizon as threats to Illinois’ waters.

The target of this campaign is recreational water users—boaters, anglers, waterfowl hunters, and others who enjoy Illinois’ waters—who might unknowingly spread these species from one body of water to another. When people trailer their boats after a day on the water, they may be carrying AIS that could accidentally be introduced into a new water body. The campaign message emphasizes three simple actions to help prevent this from happening—remove plants, animals, and mud from all equipment, drain all water from your boat and gear, and dry everything thoroughly with a towel.

A recent survey conducted by INHS’ Human Dimensions Research Program indicated that the Be A Hero—Transport Zero™ campaign is effective. Nearly 90% of those surveyed could correctly interpret the AIS prevention message represented by the logo. Even more promising is the fact that people who had previously seen or heard the campaign message were significantly more likely to always remove and drain (Williams, unpublished data). These data are very encouraging, and indicate that the public

Recreational water user equipment can easily transport aquatic invasive species such as zebra mussels. Photo by Dan Wise.
is getting the message that their actions are important in the fight against AIS.

Be A Hero—Transport Zero™ kicked off in May 2013, and to date the message has been promoted on television and radio, in print, on the internet, and at boat shows and boat landings. This summer, radio ads can be heard during Chicago Cubs broadcasts on 720 WGN in northern Illinois, and efforts to publicize the campaign downstate on radio and television are also planned for 2014. The Illinois Department of Natural Resources has also been heavily involved in promotion at events such as the Illinois State Fair.

This campaign is designed to address the spread of invasive species on land as well. The next step is creation of additional versions of the campaign logo for terrestrial invasive plants (such as garlic mustard) and forest pests (such as the emerald ash borer). Ultimately, Be A Hero—Transport Zero™ will convey a unifying message to anyone who boats, hikes, camps, fishes, or hunts in Illinois that invasive species aren’t good for Illinois’ economy or environment and that the actions of the public can and do make a difference. As the campaign progresses, look for the Be A Hero—Transport Zero™ message at trailheads, on signage, and in hunting guides and pamphlets at natural areas throughout the state.

Learn more about how recreationists can help prevent the spread of invasive species in Illinois by visiting:

www.transportzero.org

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Removing plants, animals, and mud from your equipment, draining all water from your boat and gear, and drying everything thoroughly with a towel are the three simple AIS prevention step promoted by the Be A Hero—Transport Zero™ campaign. Photos by Anjanette Riley.