



Connect with your environment

Learn about environmental issues, in your community and how you can get involved.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Presque Isle State Park is a popular destination.

Get involved and learn more

What: Natural Impressions 5th Annual Mixed Media Student Art Competition — All Things Winter

Students from first grade through college currently enrolled in a public, private or home school can share their impressions of Presque Isle in the winter. Enter the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources 5th annual mixed media student art competition. Categories include 8-by-10-inch photography, mixed media paper and canvas, 5 to 8 minute digital video, and clay and tabletop sculpture.

Registration: Open through March 27

For more information, contact: Brian Gula, Environmental Educator, at the Tom Ridge Environmental Center for details and registration by calling (814) 217-9632 or by e-mail at bgula@pa.gov.

What: Great Lakes Shipwreck Exhibition featuring Lake Erie's maritime heritage through April 25

Pennsylvania Sea Grant, the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, the Erie Maritime Museum and others have

joined forces to showcase an exciting new exhibition featuring the discovery, exploration and preservation of Great Lakes freshwater shipwrecks.

Where: The exhibit will be available for viewing on the second floor of the Tom Ridge Environmental Center, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

What: Gull Point Cleanup

Help keep Presque Isle healthy by joining park naturalists for a litter cleanup within the Gull Point Natural Area. This area is closed to the public from April 1 through Nov. 30 and is missed by the spring cleanup and coastal cleanup.

Where: Meet at the Gull Point trailhead at the Beach 10 parking lot on Presque Isle State Park. The total walk out and back to Gull Point is about 4 miles over sandy, and sometimes rough, terrain. Please dress for the weather. Waterproof boots and a trash grabber are recommended.

When: March 26, 9 a.m. to noon

Registration: Required through http://events.dcnr.pa.gov/presque_isle_state_park.

Erie Insurance shares green practices

By SARAH GACZEWSKI
Contributing writer

Students at the Neighborhood Art House (NAH) recently got a private tour of the Erie Insurance business building. Gary Diley, Vice President of Environmental Management at Erie Insurance, shared the different green practices the company has implemented.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Gary Diley shares Erie Insurance green practices with Neighborhood Art House students.

teria and how instead of Styrofoam cups they now use paper cups and reusable water bottles. He also showed them the earth tubs that help food waste break down for composting instead of sending it to the landfill.

The tour shared valuable green practices that the students can use in their own lives and that they can teach others. Sam, a NAH student, explains it best, "Being green is wonderful and when you go to the Erie Insurance Business building, Mr. Diley will tell you how to do green practices and you will see the beautiful trees and that makes you feel good inside."

SARAH GACZEWSKI is a Mercyhurst University student interning at the Neighborhood Art House.



TANE CASSERLY, NOAA

Ironically, invasive mussels improve visibility, but they cause irreversible damage to historic shipwrecks. Masses of invasive mussels have nearly obliterated many wrecks, and their collective weight causes more fragile shipwrecks to collapse. Because scuba divers can unintentionally transport invasive aquatic hitchhikers between waters, they need to take steps to stop their spread.

Clear choice

Divers can help stop aquatic invasive species

By ANNA McCARTNEY
Contributing writer

When zebra mussels dramatically increased water clarity in the early 1990s, many divers welcomed their invasion as a positive outcome.

However, it is now crystal clear that negative impacts caused by these voracious filter feeders far outweigh the benefit of increased visibility at greater depths.

Not knowing the rest of the story might tempt some to introduce zebra and quagga mussels into a pond, quarry or lake to improve clarity. Others might spread these and other aquatic invasive species (AIS) to new water bodies because they don't take the precautions to keep them from hitching a ride.

Divers can accidentally spread zebra mussels and other AIS when they get caught in the folds and seams of diving suits and in the nooks and crannies of equipment. Once they are introduced to new areas, these nonnative species lack predators, parasites, diseases and other means of control that stop them from dominating their new environment. This is true for plants as well as animals. The negative impacts to the environment far outweigh any positive benefits.

Furthermore, one of the biggest threats for the long-term survival of the marine wrecks treasured by divers and others comes from invasive mussels. They stubbornly attach to hard surfaces such as boat hulls, engines, docks, buoys, pipelines and shipwrecks. Layers of mussels, several inches thick, make it diffi-



WWW.INVADINGSPECIES.COM

Scuba divers can unintentionally transport invasive species between waters when they hitchhike on diving gear and equipment.



NOAA

The bottom image, taken in 2003, shows this wooden shipwreck in relatively pristine condition, while the top photo, shot in 2008, shows it almost completely encrusted with invasive quagga mussels.

cult for marine archaeologists to study shipwrecks and get accurate measurements. But brushing them off could tear off delicate sections of sunken wood, according to the National

Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Additionally, pieces of wrecks could break off under the weight of heavy mussel build-ups. And it's not just the wooden pieces

that are at risk. Previous research has found that mussel colonies on steel surfaces can introduce a complex community of bacteria that lowers pH levels (the lower the pH, the more acidic a solution is), which speeds up the corrosion of iron fasteners and fittings on shipwrecks.

Of the many invasive species in the Great Lakes, zebra and quagga mussels have had the greatest negative impact on marine sanctuary resources. Given the extreme effects invasive species can have, divers and snorkelers should take note and help keep the sites they love clear of invasives. By following the steps below after every dive and before exploring new areas, they can play an active role in preventing the spread of AIS.

Inspect and clean off visible plants, animals, and mud from wetsuits, dry suits, masks, snorkels, fins, Buoyancy Control Devices (BCDs), regulators, cylinders, weight belts, watercraft, motor and trailer. Drain any water before leaving water access areas. After cleaning, rinse with hot water (greater than 40 degrees Celsius or 104 degrees Fahrenheit), or soak in salt water (1/2 cup salt/gallon) for 30 minutes and follow with a thorough freshwater rinse because the salt crystals can harm equipment. Allow all gear to dry before exploring new waters.

ANNA McCARTNEY, a communications and education specialist for Pennsylvania Sea Grant, can be reached by e-mail at axm40@psu.edu.

This page brought to you by:



Check out these websites to learn more:

www.protectyourwaters.net/
<http://fishandboat.com/ais-reporting.htm>
www.fws.gov/fisheries/ans/
www.seagrant.psu.edu

Keep track of election coverage in the newspaper. How often do the candidates talk about the environment or what they will do to eliminate problems like aquatic invasive species? What should they be doing to ensure the Great Lakes ecosystem is protected?

Write a letter to the candidates telling them why the Great Lakes is important and why aquatic invasive species should be on their radar.

Send your letters for possible publication to axm40@psu.edu.

