



Bait shop owners and staff play a key role in preventing the spread of aquatic invasive species (AIS). As trusted sources of information for anglers, bait shops are well-positioned to share important tools and tips for AIS prevention. By helping customers make informed choices, they contribute to protecting local waterways and supporting the health of Pennsylvania's recreational and commercial fishing economy.

Aquatic invasive species (AIS) are non-native plants, animals, or pathogens that cause harm to the environment, the economy, and human or animal health. Preventing the spread of AIS is important because these species disrupt ecosystems, reduce biodiversity, and cost communities time, money, resources, and lost revenue once introduced.

Many species, such as Round Gobies, Freshwater Tubenose Gobies, and young-of-year invasive carp, may resemble small bait fish and can easily get mixed in with native bait for sale. Fragments of invasive plants like Hydrilla and Eurasian Watermilfoil, and microscopic Zebra Mussel larvae can be transported in water as bait shipments move from one location to another. Crayfish, which are also used as bait in Pennsylvania, are often live released, enabling species like the Rusty Crayfish and Red Swamp Crayfish to establish in Pennsylvania waterbodies. These species can have detrimental effects to native populations by competing for food, reducing spawning habitat, impacting water quality, and ultimately damaging ecosystems and fisheries.

Knowing how to recognize and remove AIS from live bait tanks is a key control point for ensuring invasive species are not sold with bait and released. Bait shops are a stop for many anglers on their way to a lake or river, and research shows that bait shop owners are an important source of fishing-related information. Therefore, bait shop owners and

employees are in an excellent position to communicate with their customers about the importance of AIS prevention. By displaying educational materials such as posters, brochures, and fact sheets at shops, and having conversations with anglers, bait shop owners and employees can help provide valuable AIS prevention information to anglers before they enjoy Pennsylvania's abundant rivers, streams, and lakes.

**Bait shop owners and employees can help prevent the spread of AIS by:**

- Recognizing potential AIS in bait shipments and tanks and removing them.
- Asking their customers to:
  - Inspect their boats, trailers, and equipment.
  - Remove all plants, animals, and mud from boats, trailers, gear, and equipment before leaving water access.
  - Drain water from watercraft, motor, bilge, bladder tanks, livewell, and portable bait containers before leaving water access.
  - Dispose of unwanted bait, fish parts, and packing material in the trash; do not dump them in the water or on land. Dumping any live bait into the water after fishing is illegal in Pennsylvania.
  - Dry all fishing gear for five days or more.

## Commonly Asked Questions

Knowing the answers to some commonly asked questions can help better prepare staff and management for talking about AIS prevention with their customers. Commonly asked questions may include:

- **Why are AIS so hard to control?** Aquatic invasive species often do not have the same predators and competitors that they would have in their native habitats. This enables them to reproduce rapidly and outcompete native species. Once established, aquatic invasive species can harm the ecosystem and impact the economic value of waterbodies.
- **I've heard that some invasive species may be beneficial to lakes, why should I be concerned?** While it is true that some invasive species like Eurasian Watermilfoil (EWM) can provide habitat for fish, and that Zebra and Quagga Mussels clear the water, the long-term effects of infestation are harmful. EWM can overtake bodies of water and make it unusable for boaters and anglers. EWM can also replace native species, which upsets the natural diversity of lakes. The perceived clearing of the water facilitated by invasive mussels is actually their filter-feeding behavior as they remove valuable food resources and leave nothing for native fish and organisms. In addition, excess clearing of the water can lead to harmful algal blooms, oxygen depletion, and fish kills.
- **What AIS regulations do I need to follow?** The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) is the primary state regulatory authority for AIS in Pennsylvania. Regulations related to AIS are largely summarized within 58 Pa. Code Chapter 71a.

A few important highlights include:

- No species of fish may be stocked into Commonwealth waters (unless baited on a hook for angling purposes) without submission of a [Notice of Stocking](#) to the PFBC.
- No live bait may be released into Commonwealth waters unless baited on a hook for angling purposes (it is unlawful to release unused live bait; please dispose of unused live bait in the trash appropriately).
- Fish collected to use as bait may not be transferred from one body of water into another.
- The sale, barter, possession, or transportation of the following species is prohibited: Northern Snakehead (all species of snakehead), Bighead Carp, Silver Carp, Black Carp, Zebra Mussel, Quagga Mussel, Round Goby, Freshwater Tubenose Goby, Ruffe, and Rudd.
- Possession, transportation, and sale of live crayfish and live Grass Carp is restricted. Only triploid (sterile) Grass Carp may be possessed or stocked, and only with a permit from the PFBC. With some exceptions, the possession and sale of all live crayfish is banned in Pennsylvania. Crayfish may not be sold as live bait. If used for bait, their heads must be removed above the eyes—unless they are being used in the same body of water where they were collected.
- Upon leaving a waterbody, boaters must check their boat and remove any plant fragments or prohibited aquatic invasive species on their boat or trailer. Boaters must also drain all water from their boat and remove drain/bilge plugs before leaving.



**Scan Now!** To access AIS fact sheets, resources, and reporting methods. Or visit us online at <https://seagrant.psu.edu/aquatic-invasive-species/>

### References:

Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission. Aquatic Invasive Species. <https://www.pa.gov/agencies/fishandboat/conservation/aquatic-invasive-species.html>

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