



Recreational fishing provides both economic and social benefits to Pennsylvania. It is important that anglers take action to remove any “hitchhikers” from their equipment, boots, nets, clothing, and other gear that touched that water while fishing so that AIS are not spread to new locations.

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.

AIS pose a significant threat to recreational and commercial fishing. Native fish populations, including both prey and game fish, are negatively impacted by AIS because they compete for food, reduce spawning habitat, feed on young of year, and impact water quality. Some species can become a serious nuisance to anglers by fouling fishing lines and stealing bait. Aquatic invasive plants also impact fishing because they clog aquatic habitats, limit access to prime fishing areas, and make navigation difficult.



CU fishing on Lake Erie. Credit iStock by Getty Images.

Anglers often travel great distances to fish at different lakes and streams, allowing unwanted species to be unintentionally transported and introduced. Hitchhikers can attach themselves to equipment, clothing, boots, and boats and move from lake to lake. Therefore, it is important to become aware of this issue and understand how to prevent further spread. By following a few simple steps, anglers can play an active role in preventing the spread of AIS:

**Clean:** Inspect and clean off plants, animals, and mud from gear and equipment including waders, footwear, ropes, anchors, bait traps, downrigger cables, dip nets, fishing lines, and field gear before leaving water access. Scrub off any visible material on footwear with a stiff brush.

- Make sure to check these areas: Clothing, fishing rod, fishing reel, fishing line, fishing vests, shoes/boots, net and tackle.

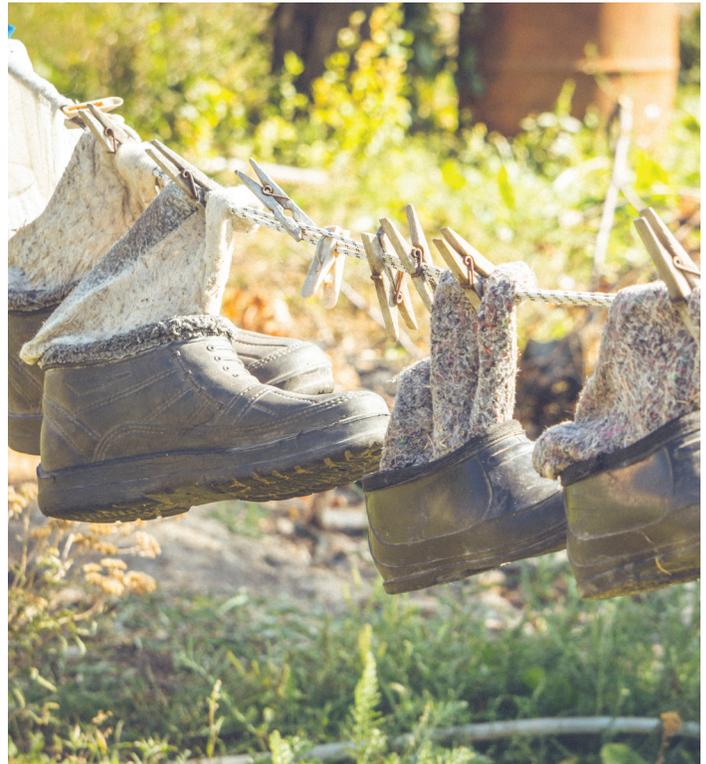
**Drain:** Drain water from watercraft, motor, bilge, bladder tanks, livewell, and portable bait containers before leaving water access.

**Dispose:** Dispose of unwanted bait, fish parts, and packing materials 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 (58 Pa. Code Chapter 71a).

**Dry:** Dry everything five days or more, unless otherwise required by local or state laws, when moving between waters to kill small species not easily seen, or if drying is not possible, wipe with a towel before reuse.

**In addition to the steps above, anglers should:**

- Use non-felt-soled boots instead of felt-soled footwear to reduce further risk of spreading AIS.
- Never release live fish, plants, or other organisms into a body of water unless they came from that body of water. Fish caught for eating or taxidermy should be cleaned away from the water and placed on ice.
- Become familiar with laws and regulations regarding fishing, bait, and aquatic invasive species, which can vary from state to state.



Fishing boots hanging to dry. Credit iStock by Getty Images.



**Scan Now** to learn more about aquatic invasive species or visit us online at <https://seagrant.psu.edu>

---

**References and Links to More Information:**

Prevention steps for anglers:

Stop Aquatic Hitchhikers [www.Protectyourwaters.net](http://www.Protectyourwaters.net)

Additional recreational user guidelines:

<https://www.fws.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Voluntary-Guidelines-Preventing-Spread-ANS-Recreational.pdf>

Report new invasive species infestations. Online reporting form:

[pfbc.pa.gov/forms/reportAIS.htm](http://pfbc.pa.gov/forms/reportAIS.htm)

Aquatic invasive species in Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania Sea Grant AIS fact sheets: <https://seagrant.psu.edu/aquatic-invasive-species-fact-sheets/>

Aquatic invasive species mapping in Pennsylvania:

iMap Invasives: [www.imapinvasives.org/](http://www.imapinvasives.org/)

Additional AIS information:

Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commissions: [www.fishandboat.com](http://www.fishandboat.com)

Wildlife Forever: [www.wildlifeforever.org/](http://www.wildlifeforever.org/)

---

Support provided by



Education · Extension · Research · <https://seagrant.psu.edu>

Pennsylvania Sea Grant is a partnership of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and Pennsylvania State University, 2025.