



Waterfowl hunting is a popular pastime for many Pennsylvanians, and hunting activities contribute significantly to the recreational economy. However, aquatic invasive species (AIS) like Eurasian Watermilfoil and Zebra Mussels can threaten habitat for waterfowl and other wildlife. Hunters should take precautions to ensure they don't spread plants and animals that can be accidentally transported on duck boats, blind material, decoy lines, and hunting gear.

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 their spread is important because once introduced, these species disrupt ecosystems, reduce biodiversity, and cost communities time, money, resources, and lost revenue.

Many people associate the threat of spreading AIS with activities such as boating and fishing; however, hunters are also at risk of moving aquatic invaders from one water body to another. Once introduced, AIS can negatively impact waterfowl habitat by degrading water quality, replacing native plants that waterfowl use for food and breeding sites, and disturbing the food chain. AIS have also been blamed for die-offs of fish-eating waterfowl in Lake Erie because invasive mussels and the Round Gobies may transfer the Type E botulism toxin up the food chain to birds where it can cause death.



Hunters often travel to multiple swamps, creeks, and rivers each season and from day to day. AIS can hitchhike in the mud, water, and plant debris that can collect on boats, decoys and lines, waders, boots, clothing, and even hunting dogs. When not in blinds, hunters often brush themselves in and hide gear in the surrounding vegetation. Even a single fragment of some kinds of vegetation could start a new population if spread to a different waterbody. By following a few simple steps, waterfowl hunters can play an active role in preventing the spread of AIS:

Clean: Inspect and clean off visible plants, animals, and mud from waders, hip boots, watercraft, motor, trailer, ATV's, push poles, decoys, decoy lines, and anchors before leaving an area. Brush hunting dogs and rinse kennels with tap water.

Check these areas: boat, motor, trailer, waters, footwear, decoys, anchors, bags, push pole, and blinds.

Drain: Drain water from watercraft, motor, bilge, and other water-containing devices before leaving water access.

Dry: Dry everything five days or more, unless otherwise required by local or state laws, or wipe with a towel before reuse.

In addition to the steps above, hunters should:

- Use non-felt soled boots to further reduce the risk of spreading AIS.
- Cut emergent vegetation above waterline for blinds or camouflage in accordance with regulations and avoid locating blinds near invasive plants such as phragmites and purple loosestrife when possible.
- Use elliptical and bulb-shaped anchors to help avoid snagging aquatic plants.
- Pick up shotgun hulls after shotting and dispose of them properly. Spent hulls can transport AIS if left to float around aquatic ecosystems.
- Stay on designated trails, roads, and developed areas. Avoid areas that are market as or suspected of having invasive species.



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References and Links to More Information:

Prevention steps for waterfowl hunters:

Stop Aquatic Hitchhikers 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

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/

Additional AIS information:

Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commissions: www.fishandboat.com

Wildlife Forever: www.wildlifeforever.org/

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