



photos-PFBC archives

CLEAN, DRAIN AND DRY— *Aquatic Invasive Species Composting Stations*

by Sean Hartzell
Aquatic Invasive Species Coordinator
Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission

You may have noticed a recent change at some Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) boat launches—new Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) composting stations.

AIS are non-native species that can cause environmental or economic harm to lakes, rivers and streams including impairment to sport fish and native organisms. They can also impede aquatic recreation like fishing and boating. In Pennsylvania, invasive plants like Hydrilla overtake and clog lakes, and Zebra Mussels contaminate boats, docks and beaches and can harm sport fish and native mussels. AIS can spread to different

waters in several ways including the inadvertent spread of AIS “hitchhiking” on boats and fishing gear. To help stop the spread of AIS in Pennsylvania, the PFBC and partners have always encouraged boaters to clean their boats. You may have seen signs at access sites. Beginning this year (2024), some recommendations are now PFBC regulations, and simple cleaning activities to stop the spread of AIS are required for boaters in Pennsylvania.

Scientific studies have shown that draining all water in a boat and then visually inspecting the boat and hand removing mud, debris, plant fragments and aquatic organisms is just as effective as taking your boat through washing systems to prevent the spread of AIS. The PFBC has been installing AIS composting stations at select lakes with known populations of Hydrilla, Zebra Mussels and other AIS, as a reminder to boaters to practice draining and inspecting their boats before leaving. Boaters can place plant fragments and other organic



An AIS composting station being installed at Tamarack Lake, Crawford County.

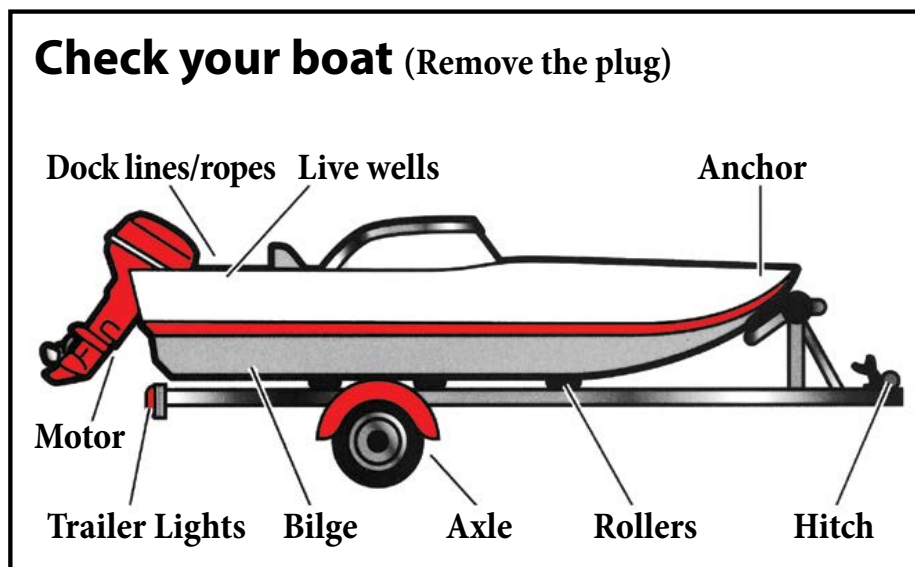
materials removed from their boat in the composting station to decompose on site. They can also compost unused live bait in these stations, as the release of unused live bait into the water is also unlawful in Pennsylvania and can contribute to the spread of AIS. The stations are a helpful reminder, but boaters must also inspect and remove mud, debris, plants and aquatic organisms from boats at areas that do not have composting stations. If a station is not available, boaters can simply bag plant fragments and aquatic organisms hitchhiking on boats

and throw them into the trash. Also, dispose of unused bait into the trash. AIS composting stations are intended for the composting of organic matter and are not receptacles for garbage.

The AIS composting stations at PFBC boat launches are a team effort of PFBC staff and Pennsylvania Sea Grant, supported by two federal grants from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. Find AIS composting stations at the Walnut Creek Marina, Erie County; Tamarack Lake, Crawford County; Conneaut Lake, Crawford County; and Opossum Lake, Cumberland County, among several other locations. In addition, some partner conservation organizations have installed stations at locations like Harveys Lake, Luzerne County.

Other agencies, such as the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, have also installed the composting stations at select locations like Pymatuning State Park, Crawford County.

On your next trip, be on the lookout for AIS composting stations and follow regulations and guidance. We all need to do our part to protect Pennsylvania's waters from the spread of AIS. ☐



When tying down a powered or unpowered boat at the launch ramp prior to leaving, drain all the water from your boat and remove any aquatic organisms and plant fragments to comply with AIS regulations. Boaters should pay extra attention to the areas noted here.