

Invasive Species in Haliburton

Next to habitat loss, invasive species are the second greatest cause of native species extinction and loss of biodiversity. Every year, invasive species cause between 14 and 35 billion dollars damage in Canada.

It would be comforting to think that there are no invasive species in Haliburton, but unfortunately that is not the case. Data, collected from anglers, Conservation Officers, cottagers and residents across Ontario shows that several invasive species are present in this county.

This article will focus on six of these species. This does not mean to say that other species are not present in Haliburton, but these that have been confirmed to exist in our lakes.

These species are:

- **Spiny Water Flea** – originally from Eurasia, this tiny crustacean was first noticed in 1982. Its lifespan varies from several days to a few weeks, and females may reproduce with or without male involvement. Eggs can become dormant over long periods of time - over winter and even out of water. They feed on zooplankton and can consume three times as much food as native species. Although not harmful to humans, they can have an adverse effect of native species that rely on a zooplankton food source.
- **Zebra Mussel** –also from Eurasia, they were first seen in lake St. Clair in 1988. They have quickly spread and are now in all of the Great Lakes and have come to Haliburton via the Trent-Severn waterway. Even though they live only 2-5 year, a female can produce up to one million eggs per year and like all invasive species they have few natural enemies in Ontario. They live on phytoplankton, which is a core element in the food chain and therefore have an adverse effect on many native species. From a human perspective, they have a positive and negative effect. An adult can filter one litre of water per day, so they make the water more clear. But they attach to hard surfaces and cause millions of dollars in damage to power generating facilities, water treatment plants and home/cottage water intakes. Their shell can also cut swimmer's feet. Luckily most lakes in Haliburton are slightly acidic and this has an adverse effect on the mussel's shells, but this has not stopped their spread into our lakes.
- **Rusty Crayfish** – is a native crustacean of the Ohio River system and was first noticed in the Kawartha Lakes in the early 1960's. One of 350 members of the north American crayfish family, their claws are larger and more robust than native Ontario crayfish and they can live for 3-5 years. It competes for food with native crayfish and fish and will prey on fish eggs. Unlike native crayfish, these may pinch a dangling finger or toe.
- **Rainbow Smelt** – were originally introduced into lake Ontario from the Finger Lakes in N.Y. and into the upper Great Lakes from Green Lake, Maine. They were probably brought into lakes in Haliburton as bait for Lake Trout when ice fishing. The main problem with this species is that it is a voracious feeder of young or small native fish and crustaceans.

- **Purple Loosestrife** – has been in Canada since the early 19th century and has been confirmed near only one lake in Dysart. It lives in wetlands, near streams and in fields. Although attractive, it is a hardy plant that can spread easily and displaces native plants (and indirectly reduces numbers of native birds and invertebrates).
- **Giant Hogweed** – really is a giant as it can reach a height of 5.5 metre under ideal conditions, and is by far the most hazardous of these invasive species. The clear watery sap contains toxins that can cause serious skin problems within 48 hours, particularly when exposed to the sun. Effects include redness, a burning sensation, blisters and even scarring. Eye contact with the sap may cause temporary blindness, so immediate flush the eyes and seek urgent medical attention. Do not try to burn or compost this plant and it is wise to hire a professional to eradicate it. In spite of these dangers, it is often used as a garden ornament in its native southwest Asia. The white flower clusters resemble Queen Anne's Lace, but can form a flower head of one metre in width. Readers are encouraged to seek more information in order to become familiar with the appearance and dangers of this plant.

It would take too long to list all of the characteristics and problems associated with each of these species, but information is readily available on the Internet and in local libraries. An excellent source is the www.invasivespecies.com web site.

With the exception of the two plants (Purple Loosestrife and Giant Hogweed) it is impossible to eradicate the species. All we can do is take steps to mitigate the problem by limiting the chances of spreading the species.

The first step is to identify where the specific species are present. MNR and the Coalition of Haliburton Property Owners (CHA) have a list showing what invasive species are present in all water bodies in Haliburton County. All associations in Haliburton can access this list to find out if their lake, river or creek is infected.

The second step is to ensure that all cottagers and residents are not only aware of the problem, but are prepared to properly clean their boats and fishing tackle after visiting any water body (both inside and out of Haliburton County).

The final step is to report to MNR, the sighting (or even suspected sighting) of an invasive species. The Invading Species Hotline is 1-800-563-7711.

With these simple steps, we can make a difference.