

Minnesota joins growing number of states tackling invasive species

By Dennis Anderson, Star Tribune

Department of Natural Resources conservation officer Lisa Kruse has extracted an angry raccoon from a suburban hot tub and thwarted the picture-window rampages of a kamikaze-style ruffed grouse – two unusual types of “invasive species.”

Now she and the DNR’s 136 other conservation officers will focus their considerable enforcement powers on far more threatening critters – zebra mussels, Asian carp, round gobies and spiny water fleas, as well as Eurasian watermilfoil and other invasive aquatic plants.

Armed with tougher invasive-species laws expected to pass the Legislature this session, more costly penalties for violators and support from Gov. Mark Dayton and thousands of concerned anglers and lake-property owners, the DNR this summer will be on heightened alert for anyone toting destructive aquatic hitchhikers on their boats or trailers as they travel from lake to lake.

“Written citations will be the norm this summer for invasive-species violations, rather than the exception, as they were last year,” said DNR conservation officer Lt. Jason Jensen.

A bill passed by the Senate this session calls for a \$500 fine for boaters who launch boats with zebra mussels attached to them into state waters. The penalty would double for a second violation.

High stakes warrant the high fines, officials say. At risk in the fight against invasive species are the state’s fabled

10,000 lakes and its nearly \$3 billion sport fishing industry. Already, zebra mussels have infested Minnetonka and Mille Lacs, two of Minnesota's most popular fishing lakes.

The intensified invasive-species enforcement effort this summer will kick off what might become the most prolonged natural-resources protection undertaking in Minnesota history, as the DNR tries to accomplish what no other state has: stopping the spread of zebra mussels and other evil aquatic critters and plants.

But it might be too little, too late. Already, zebra mussels infest at least 20 Minnesota lakes, along with the St. Croix, Mississippi and Zumbro rivers, among other state waters. Round gobies are in the Duluth harbor. Spiny water fleas inhabit various northern Minnesota waterways, and a bighead carp – one of four species of highly destructive Asian carp – was caught this spring in the St. Croix River by a commercial fisherman.

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