

Aquatic Nuisance Species Frequently Asked Questions

Aquatic nuisance species are animals, plants and even diseases that are not native to North Dakota and have the likelihood to become well established if introduced. They can displace native plants and animals, and cause serious economic and ecological damage. North Dakota has adopted a number of rules designed to minimize the threat of ANS. They include:

- All aquatic vegetation must be removed from boats, personal watercraft, trailers and associated equipment such as fishing poles/lures before leaving a body of water. That means "vegetation free" when transporting watercraft and equipment away from a boat ramp, landing area or shoreline.
- All aquatic vegetation must be removed from bait buckets when leaving the water.
- All water must be drained from boats and other watercraft, including bilges and motors, before leaving a water body (Note: effective October 1, 2010, this includes livewells and baitwells).
- Live aquatic bait or aquatic vegetation may not be transported into North Dakota. Also, all water must be drained from watercraft prior to entering the state.
- It is in North Dakota's best interest that anglers, boaters and hunters understand and comply with these important regulations. The following questions and answers are intended to provide additional insight into this vital matter.

1. Why are ANS such a big deal?

ANS can greatly degrade or ruin habitats and compete with native and/or desirable species for food and space. Not only can recreational fisheries suffer but so can industries and communities that rely on lakes or rivers for their water supply. Once established, the cost of controlling the ANS would far exceed the minimal costs required to keep from spreading it into or within North Dakota. See our most current list of ANS infested waters. Requires Adobe® Acrobat® Reader™ to view. Download it at free at <http://get.adobe.com/reader/>.

2. Can ANS spread be stopped?

Perhaps not stopped, but if precautions are taken and everyone is in compliance, the spread can be controlled. But it requires everyone's participation.

3. How do I make sure I'm doing the right thing?

To comply with the regulations, you simply need to remove all aquatic vegetation from your boat, trailer, bait bucket, etc., when you leave the water body. You need to drain all water from your boat at the ramp site before you leave the water body. Also, remember you cannot dump bait into a water body.

4. Can I put game fish in a five gallon bucket with water and transport them live? No; only legal bait and legal live baitfish can be transported. Since fathead minnows remain as a legal live baitfish, there is no alternative other than allow some water, in bait buckets, to transport minnows to a water body for fishing. In the case of game fish, there are viable alternatives to transport them home or to a fish cleaning station and they do not need to remain alive.

5. Do I have to run my motor dry also before I leave a lake?

No. The amount of water in the motor's cooling system is so minimal that it holds a small risk of containing ANS. As you exit a lake, lower the motor to let gravity drain the lower unit, then raise to transport. The intake screen should also be inspected and free of aquatic vegetation.

6. Can I drain water from my boat anywhere?

No, you must drain the water (pull all plugs, etc.) back into the water (immediate area) from which it originated. This must be done at the ramp or parking lot before you leave.

7. Why can I no longer keep fish alive in water in my livewell when I trailer my boat home?

Aquatic nuisance species can include small plant fragments or seeds, microscopic animals and viruses or diseases. If ANS exist in a water body, whether known or not (many are unseen with the naked eye), and water is pumped into a livewell, these problem species are then potentially present in the livewell water. If an angler fishes another body of water on the same trip, the ANS could be released into the new lake as water is pumped in and out of the boat.

While most individuals typically go straight home and do not fish another lake or river, if water is allowed in a livewell, ANS can still be transported. For example, if the livewell is drained into the local storm sewer, which runs into a river or holding pond, transported ANS could become a problem in a new water body.

This concern is greatly elevated with the finding of zebra mussels in the Red River. Compounding the potential problem is the fact there are approximately 10,000 licensed boats in Fargo/West Fargo and Grand Forks and many of these anglers fish both the Red River and Devils Lake and/or the Missouri River.

8. I still don't fully understand the threat of retaining water in livewells/baitwells when I go directly home after fishing and clean my fish there.

Although most people's intentions are to go straight home, there are some boaters/anglers that fish more than one water body in a day. Even if it's only 1 percent of the anglers that move from water body to water body, the threat for ANS movement increases dramatically as tens of thousands of gallons of water are transferred to new water bodies via the livewell.

9. Why aren't these ANS regulations effective when you enter a water body versus when you leave?

The goals of these rules are to greatly reduce the threat of ANS being transported from water body to water body. This potential pathway has been identified as one of the highest risks of transport by the Aquatic Invasive Species Committee. Eliminating this risk/pathway at its source – i.e. the ramp site when watercraft leave a ramp – provides the most protection by greatly reducing the risk.

If weed and water removal didn't occur until immediately before entering a new water body, then the potential ANS would be present at the ramp or along the shore and thus could easily find itself washed into a "clean" water body. Further, the transportation of weeds and water could infest other water bodies as the vehicle and boat/trailer travel across the state's roads where ANS weeds, etc. could blow into uninfected water bodies.

Likewise ANS-infested water could be intentionally or unintentionally introduced into a new water body. Angler's intentions and plans are always subject to change thus addressing the problem at its source has the highest likelihood of success.

10.If I can't use my livewell, how do I transport my fish home and keep them fresh?

For fish transport away from a water body, the Department suggests placing your fish on ice in a cooler. As an old-fashion alternative, some older generation anglers have recommended to the Department that fish could be placed in wetted gunny sacks where they will remain fresh usually long enough to be transported home or to a fish cleaning station.

11.When coming off the water, what is meant by "when out of water" as it applies to the ANS regulations that require all boats to drain water (including livewells) and be vegetation free?

Obviously, some time is required to remove aquatic vegetation and drain the water from a boat when out of water. Pulling plugs and removing vegetation should occur right on the boat ramp itself if/when these activities do not interfere with others who may be using the ramp. When there is other traffic, the boater should pull into the immediate parking lot area and perform the mandated tasks, again attempting to stay out of the way of others.

In a few locations, there is a fish cleaning station located immediate to the parking lot. In these situations, the boater can pull up to the cleaning station and perform the mandated tasks, IF not signed as prohibited (in some cases, the parking lots and fish cleaning areas are not paved and thus water should not be discharged as it will make the area muddy). Legally only the ramp, parking lot and immediate fish cleaning station are the areas for vegetation removal and pulling the plugs.

12.Do the same rules apply for tournaments?

Yes; if a tournament has an approved live-release format, weigh-ins and fish released will need to occur at the boat ramp site where boats launch and exit. Fish will not be allowed to be transported in livewells to off-site weigh-in stations.

13.How then do I legally move my minnows from the bait shop to the lake and then back home?

Transporting bait in a live/baitwell when out of water is illegal. However, transport of legal live baitfish and bait to or from a water body is still allowed via minnow buckets or other containers as long as they are 5 gallons or less.

14.Why is it OK to transport minnows in up to 5 gallons of water in a bait bucket and move from lake to lake, but we can't use livewells when out of the water?

Allowing water transport in bait buckets remains a potential pathway of ANS between water bodies, but eliminating the transport of water in bait buckets would essentially prohibit the use of any live bait fish in North Dakota. Allowing 5 gallons of water in bait buckets is a compromise between reducing the risk of transporting ANS, while allowing anglers to possess enough water to keep their bait alive.

The bait bucket has a smaller volume (5 gallons or less), which makes it less likely to transport ANS to a new location than a livewell (which commonly have 30 gallons of water). Also, the smaller volume makes it easier to visually inspect the water to comply with the rule that bait buckets must be weed-

free. The allowance of minnow transport in bait buckets has been factored into a risk assessment ... and at this time, there are no plans to prohibit.

15. Why does it need to be a bait bucket capable of holding 5 gallons of water (or less) and not a cooler or other container that has larger capacity but contains only 5 gallons of water (or less) when transporting bait fish?

A commercial bait bucket (which typically hold a gallon or two of water) or 5 gallon buckets are by far the two most commonly (and widely) used containers for transporting bait fish. Anything larger, even when only 5 gallons (or less) of water is present, is unacceptable, as measuring the volume of water in such large containers can become problematic for game wardens in the field. Coolers of 5 gallons or less in volume are legal.

16. What if three people are fishing together for the weekend. Can they combine all their bait together in one 15-gallon or 60-quart cooler?

No, a container cannot exceed 5 gallons in volume, no matter how many anglers. The three anglers however could have three separate containers, each 5 gallons or less in volume.

17. This bait provision only affects transport of bait, not keeping them alive at home, right? If a person keeps their bait alive at home, can they do it in a larger container?

Yes. These rules apply to transport only.

18. Can I put game fish in a 5-gallon bucket with water and transport them live?

No; only legal bait and legal live baitfish can be transported.

19. When at a boat ramp, where do I put the aquatic weeds I pull off my trailer and/or boat?

Removed weeds can be discarded along the shore, and/or in trash receptacles (if available in parking lot). ANS regulations specify the removal of all aquatic weeds prior to leaving the immediate access area.

20. What else can I do to help prevent the spread of ANS?

You can disinfect your boat by adding hot water (110° F or warmer) to the livewell along with enough household chlorine bleach to reach a solution of 1 part bleach to 20 parts water. Run the recirculation pumps and use a brush (a toilet brush works well) to scrub under the lid and in the corners. Drain the solution in an appropriate location, not into the lake. Air drying can also be effective in preventing ANS transfer.

The livewell, bilge and equipment must be allowed to completely dry, which may take a few days for the bilge. However, some ANS produce hardy seeds and eggs which can withstand extended periods out of the water; in these cases, air drying is not the answer. Power-washing can remove lake scum and unseen hitchhikers, such as small plant fragments or egg masses, from hard-to-reach places such as trailer frames and livewells. Use a commercial car wash that runs water through a sewage treatment system. If done at home, be careful that the wash water does not run down the street and into the storm sewer that empties into the local river or lake.

21. What if I observe boats, trailers, jet skis, etc. that have weeds hanging from them away from a lake? The best thing you can do is spread the word on the risk of ANS. If the boat owner/operator is present and willing, ask that they clean the boat and trailer. If the owner/operator is not cooperative call the Report All Poachers line (1-800-472-2121).