

Sea Grant Files, 25 September 2018

Wrangling Aquarium Fish and Invasive Species Experts

Hi. I'm Jesse Schomberg and you're listening to the Sea Grant Files.

Here's something to think about ... the doors to Duluth's animal humane society will be temporarily open to unwanted fish, reptiles, amphibians and aquatic plants on the first Saturday in October from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

If you can't make it to the October 6 aquarium surrender event in Duluth, there's another one ... just for fish ... going on two weeks later in Bloomington, Minnesota. During that one, the surrendered fish will be auctioned off later the same day.

I'm talking about these opportunities to help aquarium or water garden pets and plants find new homes because ... well, I'm a nice guy ... but mainly because they offer an alternative to releasing unwanted fish, turtle, snakes, frogs, etc., into the environment, which is illegal and can have damaging consequences. The problem is really a global one: people are dumping the contents of their aquariums, goldfish bowls and water gardens into waterbodies where ... if they don't perish quickly ... the creatures and vegetation can become destructive.

For instance, ... earlier this year the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources officials determined that the introduction of pet goldfish or ornamental koi was the source of the koi herpes virus that killed large numbers of carp in Lake Byllesby near Cannon Falls. Koi herpes virus afflicts the gills and skin of common carp, koi and goldfish, but it cannot be transferred to humans or other animals. It has been found in at least eight other southern Minnesota lakes in the past year.

To reiterate, releasing aquarium pet or ornamental fish into the environment is illegal and can upset the balance of natural systems. There are two common reasons people do it, though. One is they mistakenly believe that it's humane ... that they are doing the pet or plant a favor. The other is convenience ... they don't have the time or energy to find their animals or plants new homes and they don't want to euthanize them.

Doug Jensen, Minnesota Sea Grant's aquatic invasive species program coordinator says most aquarium owners are doing the right thing and they are holding onto their fish or giving them away. Still, he says, everything from alligators to boa constrictors to piranhas have been found roaming in Minnesota, where goldfish are the most prevalent non-native aquarium species showing up. In his relentless fight against aquatic invasive species, Doug helped ensure thirty-dozen live crayfish used as study specimens in Hermantown, Minnesota, could be returned to the biological supply house for reuse.

"The Hermantown kids were pretty excited," Doug reports. "The students helping to box up the crayfish really loved the idea that they would be reused instead of being fed to zoo animals."

This brings me back to the aquarium pet and plant surrender events. In Minnesota, Sea Grant works with partners through the Habitattitude Network to offer people an option to give up their aquatic flora and fauna for adoption. Habitattitude is a national public awareness campaign coordinated by the Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Sea Grant.

The Great Lakes Sea Grant Network, including Minnesota Sea Grant, has been hosting fish rehoming events for two years thanks to funding through the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative. With support from Habitattitude collaborators, Minnesota Sea Grant helped 500 animals find new homes through surrender events. Each participating Sea Grant program has used a different model. Doug Jensen will be speaking about this Habitattitude work at the Upper Midwest Invasive Species Conference happening in Rochester, Minnesota, in about three weeks ... October 15 to 18.

Doug said, "Every aquarium pet or plant surrender event in Minnesota reflects the Habitattitude collaboration. That's why some involve only fish and the one in Duluth includes turtles, snakes and frogs. Last May's event, held through the Minnesota Herpetological Society, rehomed 22 amphibians and reptiles."

Doug is not only speaking at the Upper Midwest Invasive Species Conference but he's also co-chairing it. Additionally, while there, he is co-leading a special symposium on biological organisms in trade, which includes crayfish, goldfish, and water hyacinth. The Upper Midwest Invasive Species Conference is the largest invasive species conference in North America. It aims toward strengthening the management of invasive species, especially prevention, control, and containment to reduce the costly impacts. It also provides a forum for professionals, land managers, researchers, nonprofits, and others to exchange ideas. You are welcome to attend. Full registration is \$290. Check out the Upper Midwest Invasive Species Conference website at u-m-i-s-c-dot-net. That's u-misc-dot-net.

Since 2014, the Minnesota Legislature has set aside \$10 million each year for counties to fight aquatic invasive species. The University of Minnesota Sea Grant Program is part of that fight. If you want to learn more about aquatic invasive species, the Upper Midwest Invasive Species Conference or Habitattitude surrender events, the University of Minnesota Sea Grant Program by email at seagr@d-dot-umn-dot-edu or by phone at (218) 726-8106 ... ask for Doug Jensen.

Let's keep Minnesota's waters clean!

This episode of the Sea Grant Files was produced by Sharon Moen, Chris Harwood, KUMD and me, Jesse Schomberg. For more information, or to listen to other episodes of the Sea Grant Files, visit Minnesota Sea Grant at w-w-w-dot-sea-grant-dot-u-m-m-dot-e.d.u. Thanks for listening!