

News Release

National Wildlife Refuge System



Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge La Crosse District N5727 County Road Z Onalaska, WI 54650

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
October 14, 2015**

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Invasive Aquatic Plant Species Found in Lake Onalaska

Invasive aquatic plants imported from South America typically used in backyard ponds and aquariums were found along the shoreline of Lake Onalaska in Pool 7. Water lettuce and water hyacinth are highly invasive aquatic species and can spread very quickly. This is the third instance of these plants being found in the upper Mississippi River. In 2011, water hyacinth and water lettuce were discovered in a dozen locations in Pool 5 near Buffalo City, Wisc. and in 2012, a large infestation of nearly 10,000 plants were discovered in a secluded backwater bay.

Forty volunteers, Refuge staff, and Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources staff have worked diligently over the past few days to remove the plants by hand so the invasive species can be bagged and disposed of properly. Plants have been found along approximately 3.5 miles of shoreline both north and south of Fred Funk Landing, mainly contained between the barrier islands and shore. A few plants have been found near the south end of Lake Onalaska.

Only you can help stop invaders from entering the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge! While the source of this invasion is still under investigation, it is a reminder for everyone who uses these valuable natural resources to be diligent in their efforts to not transport invasive and/or exotic species; remove vegetation from boat trailers, empty bait buckets on land, pull your drain plugs, and NEVER release anything from your home into the wild.

If you find any of these invasive aquatic plants on the Mississippi River, please report them immediately by calling the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at 1-608-779-2399.

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The Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge is the most visited refuge in the United States. The refuge extends 261 miles along the Upper Mississippi River from Wabasha, Minn. to Rock Island, Ill., protecting and preserving habitat for migratory birds, fish, and a variety of other wildlife. This 240,000 acre refuge was established in 1924.

In addition to being the most visited refuge in the country, the “Upper Miss” Refuge has the added complexity of a major navigation system, including 11 locks and dams, within its boundary. It is also a world-class fish and wildlife area which harbors 306 species of birds; 119 species of fish; more than 300 active bald eagle nests; thousands of heron and egret nests; spectacular concentrations of canvasback ducks, tundra swans, and white pelicans; and several threatened or endangered species.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.