

Protecting Wisconsin's Fisheries:

What all muskie anglers should know about Viral Hemorrhagic Septicemia

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As viral hemorrhagic septicemia (VHS) continues to threaten Wisconsin's waters, muskie anglers are in a unique position to prevent the spread of this deadly fish disease. Although many people have heard about the threat of invasive plant species, which affect native plant diversity and degrade muskie habitats, VHS can spread throughout lakes and rivers without us really noticing.

This is because VHS is a fish virus that can spread easily to healthy fish that eat infected fish or absorb water carrying the virus. If one fish gets sick, they all can. As a result the virus is likely responsible for killing 90 percent of the St. Lawrence River's world-renowned muskie population in recent years. Similarly, fisheries officials believe that VHS is responsible for a number of muskie fish kills across the Great Lakes, as well as in Ohio and Michigan.

Currently, the University of Wisconsin-Madison is working with fishing organizations to try and spread the word about VHS. The UW program is focused on promoting awareness about VHS among Wisconsin anglers, by starting with the men and women who use Wisconsin waters the most. According to Professor Bret Shaw from the Department of Life Science Communication at the UW-Madison, "Wisconsin muskie fishing organizations are important partners in helping to spread the word about VHS to other musky anglers around the state because they are the people who are most aware of the problem and also witness the damage that VHS can cause."

How can you help? First, it is important to follow the rules regarding VHS in Wisconsin.

- 1) Drain all water from boats and fishing equipment.
- 2) Don't move live fish.
- 3) Only use live bait purchased from a Wisconsin bait dealer.
- 4) You can use leftover minnows on the same water,
- 5) BUT, when moving from lake to lake, do not add water or fish to your container.

By respecting these rules, we can set a good example for other anglers who may not be aware of VHS or the necessary steps that need to be taken to prevent the spread of the virus.

Next, keep topics like aquatic invasive species and VHS on the agenda of your fishing organization. By staying up-to-date with current threats to Wisconsin's lakes and rivers, we can all help protect our waters and fisheries.

For more information about the UW-Madison program, please contact Bret Shaw by email at brshaw@wisc.edu or by phone at 608-890-1878.