**How can YOU help protect BFL with the installation of your dock, lift, and other water related equipment? By Kevin Farnum, Stearns County AIS Chairperson**

In a few months shore owners will be scrambling to get their docks, lifts, rafts, and other water related equipment into the lake. But did you know that this act may create a BIG Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) risk for the lake? No, not from the dock, lift, raft or equipment which has sat out of the water all winter and is going back into the same water it came from, **but from the person installing the equipment**, the service provider. Just like boats traveling from lake to lake without adequately cleaning, draining, and drying can create a risk for the lake, so can a service provider when they travel from lake to lake. That service provider may have equipment such as ATV’s, towing belts, waders, hip boots, etc. that can transfer aquatic invasive species if not cleaned and treated properly. The service provider needs to decontaminate the ATV, clean, drain, dry or thermally decontaminate, just like a boat should be treated when it travels from lake to lake. Towing belts, waders, hip boots, and other equipment that becomes wet must be cleaned of visible aquatic plants, animals, and mud. Any visible material should be scrubbed off with a stiff brush. Non-felt soled boots should be used instead of felt-soled footwear. Soaking of equipment inside and outside in very hot water, even using ½ cup of salt per gallon of water may be helpful in treating equipment. If feasible, freezing equipment for 72 hour will kill any remaining microscopic AIS. The best of all is a separate set of those items that are difficult to clean, so cross contamination is not possible.

 Also, did you know that all lake service providers must complete AIS training, learning how to identify and remove AIS, and obtain a DNR permit? The permit must be displayed in the lower driver’s side corner of their vehicle’s windshield. Also, did you know if you plan to move a dock, lift or other water equipment from one lake or river to another, all aquatic plants and animals must be removed whether they are dead or alive. According to Minnesota law, the equipment must be free of AIS and dried for 21 days before it can be placed in another waterbody.

 So if YOU use a service provider be sure they have a permit and have gone through AIS training, ask them what lake they were in last, how did they clean their equipment or do they have another set for Big Fish Lake? If you don’t get the right answers, find someone else. Thank you for helping to protect our beautiful lake!