**Week 23- Winter Sports- Invasive Species**

**Conservation Corner**

***Conservation Corner is a weekly article produced by the Forest County Land Conservation-Land Information Department. For more information contact Al Murray, County Conservationist-Land Information/GIS Director at 715-478-1387 or by e-mail at*** ***lcc@co.forest.wi.us******.***

Winter seems to have come to stay. Snow covers the ground and many lakes have started to freeze over. To some winter is a curse, to others they cannot wait until this time of year.

To Forest County, winter brings a boom to business in the form of snowmobilers and ice fishermen which frequent our gas stations for fuel, snacks, beverages, and bait. These same sportsmen also frequent our bars and restaurants for food, drinks and heat! Some businesses in Forest County rely on winter for over 50% of their income which comes over a 2-3 month season. Winter is important to Forest County and we welcome all the winter enthusiast.

A lot of the efforts of this office are spent in identifying and beginning control of invasive species that are located in the County. Forest County does have issues with invasive species in certain locations and our lakes and forest seem to be under attack by various species both aquatic species (water species) and terrestrial species (land species)

Species such as the Eurasian Water Milfoil, Zebra Mussel and the Spiny Water Flea have only begun their attack on Forest County Lakes. These species are often transferred from site to site by water in bait buckets**. To protect the lakes and streams of Forest County, please buy bait locally and retain all water in your bait buckets, do not empty them on the ice or in the water.**

Although not usually in the spotlight at this time of the year, we must also be careful of the equipment that we use. Loggers and contractors know this well and are required to address the issue before moving to a new area. Often times snowmobiles, ATVs and sleds utilized to carry winter equipment are pulled and operated through all kinds of “weeds” and dry vegetation. This dry vegetation usually has ripe seeds that are ready to fall, when they fall on equipment, they can be spread over long distances by trailer or vehicle. Once brought to a new area with frozen snow or ice, the seeds can travel a long way with the wind moving them.

Of a particular concern to Forest County is a species called phragmites. phragmites is a large grass that overtakes areas, especially on wetter ground and in wetlands. Most have seen phragmites lining the ditchs along Hwy 141 near Green Bay. Phragmites is very common in counties to the south and east, including Marinette, Oconto, Brown and Outagamie to name a few. Forest County has the advantage in that this species has only been located and controlled in a very few locations. Once pharagmites is established it spreads rapidly and is very costly to control.

Many other species of invasive plants can also be transported by seed. **To protect the forest and wetlands of Forest County, please clean your recreational equipment by washing it or blowing it free of debris using an air compressor before you travel long distances.** This will limit the transfer of invasive species seeds that could cause a new infestation, wherever you may go.

Hopefully you have had a good Thanksgiving, deer season and fall, welcome to winter!