Help stop the spread of invasive species

By Sarah Sobanski

At a recent shoot at Bancroft Ridge Golf Club co-owner John Puffer and Bancroft Mayor Paul Jenkins included me in a conversation about how Bancroft and its surrounding area are the heart of "unspoiled cottage country."

North Hastings has a number of pristine lakes and presents a rare experience for locals and visitors alike. I don't need to tell you how important it is that we take measures to keep it this way, both for future development and for those generations that will come after us.

Cottagers and locals alike were in for a treat June 23 when the Federation of Anglers and Hunters/Ontario Invasive Species Awareness Program stopped in at Hastings Highlands Poop Talk and Aliens event. Monitoring and information services specialist Brook Schryer took the audience through a number of invasive species that are a threat to our northern lakes and waterways. He explained tips to help identify species and what to do if you find them.

Invasive species present a threat to our home. As our awareness of them spreads, so does our ability to step up as environmental stewards to ensure we keep their damage to a minimum.

For example, one invasive species you might have heard of is Eurasion Water-Milfoil, the weed that weeds out water ecosystems. According to **ontario.ca/invasivespecies**, this "submerged, rooted, perennial, aquatic plant" is in Ontario ? "in all of the Great Lakes, and in many inland waters of southern Ontario to coastal Georgian Bay on the southern Canadian Shield. Found in the St. Lawrence River system, southwestern Quebec and throughout much of the United States." Its "branching stems may reach lengths of... approx. 1.5 to 23 feet, especially at the water surface where it often curves to lie parallel with surface. Stem tips are reddish in colour. The stem just below the flower spike is almost twice as thick as the width of the lower stem."

So what pray tell are the impacts of this plant? According to the site, Eurasion Water-Milfoil "forms dense stands with entangled branches near water surface. [It] may cover large areas of the water surface, outcompeting native vegetation and impeding water traffic and recreation."

Another popular Big Bad is, of course, zebra mussels. They're "small freshwater mussels usually 2 to 2.5 centimetres long, (approx. 1 inch) but may be up to 4 centimetres in length (approx 1.5 inches.) The[ir] larvae are microscopic." You might find them "in Lake St. Clair, Lake Erie, Lake Ontario, Lake Huron and Lake Superior, the connecting waterways, the St. Lawrence River and in some inland lakes and rivers, including the Rideau Canal and Trent-Severn Waterway in southern Ontario." They "form dense colonies and filters large quantities of plankton from the water." They "compete for food with native fish and invertebrates [and] outcompete and interrupt reproduction of native mussels." Not to mention their "shells are sharp and restrict recreational use of beaches [and] colonize municipal and industrial water intake pipes restricting flow."

But have you heard of plants Water Soldier, European Frog-bit, European Water Chestnut? What about the Round Goby, Northern Snakehead or the Rusty Crayfish? The number of invasive species that we need to look out for is lengthy.

Schryer said early detection and rapid response are key. It's imperative that you go on the province's invasive species website and know what to look out for. You can report invasive species sightings by calling the OFAH's Invading Species Hotline at 1-800-563-7711 or by downloading the the EDDMaps app].

Even if you're not sure, Schryer said you can report a sighting and have professionals identify it just to be safe.
If this doesn't sound like the kind of homework you can commit to ? which, it should be ? make sure when you're transporting your boat that you clean, rinse and dry it before dropping it in another waterbody.

Don't believe me? Schryer said even those first two steps can eradicate up to 95 per cent of invasive species ? some of which are

invisible to the human eye. Drying your boat for five to seven days on top of that can close the gap of the remaining five per cent.

Let's do our part.