

Watch for Great Lakes invaders moving inland, group told

By [Dan Egan](#) of the *Journal Sentinel*

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Great Lakes, Great Peril

Special Section: This series will periodically examine challenges facing the Great Lakes in what experts forecast will be the century of water.



Green Bay - University of Notre Dame professor David Lodge has some advice for inland lakefront property owners worried about unwanted organisms invading their seemingly isolated waters: Keep an eye on the Great Lakes.

"The Great Lakes are a beachhead - just the first stopping point for species arriving in North America," Lodge told a group of about 400 people who are gathered in Green Bay this week for the 31st annual Wisconsin Lakes Convention.

"If you want to know what's coming next," he said Thursday, "look at what's already in the Great Lakes."

Organizers originally did not plan to focus their three-day conference on combating invasive species.

Then they took a look at the suggestion cards from last year's gathering, and it became clear that things like zebra mussels and the fish-killing VHS virus are among the top concerns for citizens and local officials looking at protecting the future of their waterways.

"It was overwhelming," said Jeff Bode of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

"Aquatic invasive species has just taken off as such a big issue."

So the conference's three host organizations - the DNR, University of Wisconsin Extension and Wisconsin Association of Lakes - brought in some of North America's top experts on aquatic invasive species to talk about the sources of the problem and how to protect their lakes.

There are other pathways for unwanted fish, viruses and mollusks to make their way into Wisconsin's inland waters - barges traveling up the Mississippi River, for example - but the Great Lakes are a hot spot for invasive species because of their direct connection to the outside world via the St. Lawrence Seaway.

The Great Lakes now are home to about 185 foreign species. The majority of invasions since the Seaway opened the lakes to overseas traffic a half-century ago can be blamed on freighters arriving from foreign ports.

Lodge presented a slide from John Drake, a professor at the University of Georgia, that revealed that the Great Lakes are linked directly to 12% of the world's ports. Those ports, in turn, are connected to 80% of the world's ports. And those ports are connected to 99% of the world's ports.

He said that means someone living on an isolated body of water far inland from Lakes Michigan and Superior could easily be exposed to organisms from around the globe. The freighters bring the organisms into the region; recreational boaters take over from there.

Jerry Kabelowsky lives on Pike Lake just east of Hartford, where zebra mussels were discovered several years ago. They likely arrived as stowaways aboard a boat that had been on Lake Michigan, about 20 miles to the east.

"You could tell because of where we started to find them - right out from the boat launches," he said.

Initially, the lake got clearer; now it's also prone to algae outbreaks, likely fueled by increased sunlight penetration.

Lodge said science shows the best way to protect inland waterways is to try to control what leaves bodies of water that already are infested.

He said trying to shield a single lake doesn't work well because invasions mount in adjoining waters and eventually spread like a blanket across whole regions.

"Spend your time and money at other lakes, lakes that have already been invaded," he advised the group.

A big problem is that people who live on infested waters don't have the same passion for controlling an organism's spread as those who live on uninfested lakes.

Anthony Ricciardi of McGill University in Canada said one of the first steps in addressing the problem is to keep new species from arriving on the continent in the first place. Great Lakes states and federal agencies are working on laws or rules that many hope will do just that.

"Until we control the ships, there will be lots of species nobody has ever heard of arriving on their doorsteps," he said.