

# MiSustainable Holland

## About this series

The MiSustainable Holland column is a collection of community voices sharing updates about local sustainability initiatives.

## This Week's Sustainability Framework Theme:

**Community Knowledge:** The collective knowledge and energy of the community is an incredible resource that must be channeled to where it is needed.

## Responsible recreation helps limit spread of aquatic pests and disease

By Sarah Washabaugh  
ODC Network

Those who visited Kollen Park in the weeks leading up to Tulip Time may have noticed some dead fish present on the shoreline. While a winter die-off of fish is an expected, natural, and seasonal phenomenon in our waterways, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) [tested and confirmed](#) that this specific accumulation of fish was due to a viral infection, [Viral Hemorrhagic Septicemia](#) (VHS).

This infection has the potential to cause large-scale fish kills, but it is not expected to impact our local fish populations any further. In addition, VHS cannot survive human body temperatures, so it is not a threat to humans or pets that come into contact with, or the ingestion of, potentially infected fish or water.

This virus has been reported in Lake Michigan before, but is typically seen more on the east side of the state in the Lake St. Clair/Lake Erie/Detroit River system.

To prevent further spread of this virus (or other threats) locally, people recreating in water-related or water-adjacent activities should thoroughly clean all gear that makes contact with water.

Boaters and anglers moving between bodies of water are encouraged to follow the “Clean, Drain, Dry” method that has proven effective in limiting the spread of aquatic pests:

**Clean:** While still near the water, remove visible aquatic plants, animals and mud, returning them to their ecosystem. After consulting relevant user manuals to learn the recommendations for your specific equipment, rinsing interior compartments and motors with hot water will also remove unwanted objects or organisms from your vessels, in addition to disinfecting it. Away from river/lake water access, using a 10 percent bleach solution, disinfect all boats, trailers, and equipment such as lifejackets, ropes, anchors, tubes, fishing gear, and so on.

**Drain:** Drain all bilges and live wells before leaving a body of water.

**Dry:** Allow cleaned surfaces to dry for at least five days, or wipe down with a towel.

**Dispose** is also sometimes included in this list for those bringing organisms into the environment, such as pieces of fish or worms for fishing bait. Ensuring that these non-native organisms are disposed of appropriately is important in preserving our ecosystems.

In addition to limiting the spread of VHS, these practices help to protect our water from invasive plants and animals that would otherwise disrupt ecosystems within Lake Mac, resulting in extensive economic and natural resource damage.

It's helpful to learn what our common invasive organisms look like ahead of spending time in the places where they could be seen. The Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy

(EGLE) and Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development together operate the Aquatic Invasive Species Monitoring initiative and provide [identification guides](#) to learn about our most relevant species.

In Holland, the DNR was alerted to the accumulation of fish through an online reporting app called [Eyes in the Field](#). Similarly, we can help keep the state informed about relevant aquatic threats. Report any new invasive aquatic species on the watch list that you see by calling (517)342-4087 or go to [eagle-wrd-aip@mi.go](mailto:eagle-wrd-aip@mi.go), or report known species through the Midwest Invasive Species Information Network (MISIN) [online reporting tool](#) or app.

- *Sarah Washabaugh is a conservation educator for the ODC Network.*