



## VHS NO LONGER CAUSING HUGE FISH DIE-OFFS

### *But Boating and Fishing Enthusiasts Should Remain Vigilant*

Fishing and boating enthusiasts in the Great Lakes region can be proud and relieved that their actions since 2006 have helped to contain huge fish die-offs from the infectious disease Viral Hemorrhagic Septicemia (VHS), according to U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) veterinarian Dr. Paul G. (Gary) Egrie.

“While this is good news, people still have to remain vigilant so that VHS, other fish diseases and invasive species are contained and controlled,” he adds.

The VHS pathogen was first discovered in 2006 in Lake St. Claire, in Michigan and caused significant deaths to some native fish species at that time. Federal and state officials reacted immediately with aggressive regulatory actions and community education programs. The result has been a decrease in die offs, notes Egrie. And, while the virus now has been found in all five of the Great Lakes, it is not causing the massive fish deaths that have been seen in the past.

“We want to let people know that their actions made a difference,” he says. “People can spread the disease, and people can contain it.”

Containing VHS and other ecologically upsetting pathogens and invasive species is vital, he notes. “We want to keep them from spreading to inland lakes, small ponds and new areas.” he said. “If the disease is introduced to a population that has no resistance, it can be devastating.”

VHS found in the larger bodies of water is there to stay, he notes. “But, simple cleaning steps by boaters and fishermen can keep the pathogen in the areas where it is now found, and prevent its spread to smaller lakes, rivers and streams. We want these actions to become habit, like fastening your seat belt or brushing your teeth.”

Most fish viruses and invasive diseases are hardy and can survive in a variety of environments, so the following practices can help stem their spread:

1. Thoroughly clean and dry all fishing and boating equipment including bait buckets, boots, boats, and trailers with HOT water.
2. Empty all water from equipment including buckets and bilges.
3. Remove all visible mud, plants and aquatic life from equipment before transporting.
4. Do not move fish and plants from one body of water to another.
5. Buy bait from reputable bait dealers and dispose of unused bait in a secure trash area away from the water.

For more information, visit <http://www.FocusOnFishHealth.org>.

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