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Wednesday, May 16, 2001

Act now to protect the Lakes: IJC bo

By PETER GEIGEN-MILLER, Free Press Rep

Quick action to slam the door on the invasion of alien spe Great Lakes is being urged by a lakes advisory body.

In its report, the Great Lakes Water Quality Board, part of t International Joint Commission (IJC), says invading alien s displace native species, interfere with beneficial human use and are costly to control.

It urges the commission to push for controls on discharge o from ships, one of the main ways alien species get into the

In recent years, the lakes have been invaded by non-native as zebra mussels and the eurasian ruffe, a small fish that fee eggs of native whitefish. The ruffe also has caused a seriou yellow perch in some areas.

Zebra mussels build up on hard surfaces, layering on boat h clogging water intakes.

Since they were first spotted in 1988, they've spread throug and into other lakes and rivers.

Control costs run into the billions of dollars.

The board wants to prevent further invasions.

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The water quality board is one of several groups advising the member body that advises the Canadian and U.S. governments on Lakes problems.

The report says the IJC should urge Ottawa and Washington to set effective binational standards for ballast water discharge.

One complication is that 80 per cent of vessels entering the lake report no ballast water on board, but from current controls, it says.

But ballast tanks often contain small amounts of residual water and alien species can lurk.

When lake water is pumped into the tanks, it mixes with the water. Species can then escape when the mixed water is pumped into the lakes.

To end this threat, the board wants the IJC to recommend a ban on water discharges from vessels not meeting binational standards.

It also suggests governments work with shippers and others to kill alien species in ballast water. Possibilities include filtering, ultraviolet light, heat and ozone.

It wants the commission to propose chemical treatment of ballast water in an emergency, short-term measure until more permanent controls are in place.

IJC spokesperson Jennifer Day said the report will go to the commissioners for consideration. They will decide whether to make the recommendations to the Canadian and U.S. governments.

The full text of the report can be seen at www.ijc.org

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