

Bill contains mechanics to fight invasive species



Legislative News

by Rep. Paul Anderson

A bill unveiled in the Environment, Energy, and Natural Resources Committee March 24 contains the mechanics that the DNR hopes to employ in its fight against Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS). There is a sense of urgency related to the bill because fishing opener is less than two months away, and officials want the new regulations in place by that time.

Under the bill, known as HF 1162, fines for violations of the law have been increased, in addition to requiring those who work installing docks and boatlifts to undergo training and become certified. Compliance inspections are also part of

this new legislation, and they can become a condition for the launching of boats. An inspector may prohibit an individual from placing or operating a boat in waters of the state if that individual refuses to allow an inspection of water-related equipment or who refuses to remove and dispose of aquatic invasive species.

The "drain-plug law", which went into effect last year, remains and has been expanded to include portable bait containers under this new bill. The water from bait containers must be disposed of and new water added if the bait is to be saved. The other new aspect of the bill would require service providers (those who work installing docks and boatlifts) to complete invasive species training and pass an exam. The cost of such a permit is \$50 and would be valid for three years.

Civil penalties for violations of this new legislation range from \$100 to \$500. Fines for repeat violators could be doubled.

Last week was busy at the Capital. Finance bills faced a March 25 deadline to be moved out of their respective committees. I serve on three such committees – K-12 education, agri-

culture, and environment and energy – so there were some long days and nights involved with them. The education bill, which contains several reform ideas for schools, met for double sessions many days in the past two weeks. One day we started at 9 a.m. and finished at 9 p.m., with a break inbetween for a floor session of the House.

The spending target for our schools was a good one, considering the difficult economic condition of the state. Under the House bill, basic per-pupil aid was increased while special education spending was capped. Schools in our district would see slight increases in funding if this bill were to become law. However, early indications are that there are parts of the bill the Governor doesn't agree with, so its future is unsure.

The agriculture budget takes a cut in spending, much like other departments of state government. The final round of ethanol producer payments is made under the bill, which means that state obligation is finally completed. Other programs supported by the Agriculture Department are largely left intact but have a reduction in their funding levels.

