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You've had a common goldfish before. Trust me, we all have. We all get sad when it turns a weird color and floats to the top of the tank, stomach up. Even if it isn't dead, when people are done with their fish, they will often flush it down the toilet or put it in a pond or lake near them. Both of these can effect the lake hugely.

When we think of invasive species, we think of zebra mussels, buckthorn, and emerald ash bores. What most people don't know is that our little pet goldfish can be classified as invasive species too.

If you want to get rid of your fish, don't flush it or put it in a pond. A better method would be if you just freeze them in a bag and throw them away. If you put them in a pond, they can effect the water, making it harder for other native fish to live.

Another growing problem in the area is the zebra mussel. Zebra mussels are impossibly small as eggs, and can attach to the bottom of your boat. If you are traveling from lake to lake, be sure to clean off the bottom of your boat. If you don't, lets just say you would be seeing a lot of fish bellies floating in the water.

Fish can die from many other additional ways. Oil spills are a smaller issue here in Duluth, but if they happen, they can be deadly. The U.S Coast Guard has their hands full when it comes to maintaining and cleaning up oil spills. To contain spills, they use hydrophobic booms. These booms are placed on top of water, and soak up only the oil, and steers clear from soaking up water. Cleaning up the oil is a similar process, consisting of using absorbent pads. Hydrophobic as well, the pads are laid out across the water and clean the oil up, without effecting the water.

Lake Superior and the St. Louis River have come a long way since the times of the first settlers in the late 1800's, when they were just a big dump. Rivers smelled of sludge, and the lake was murky and gross. Still, even now, you will find the occasional soda can or glass bottle on the shore.

A large contributor to clean up of the Mississippi and other large rivers is Chad Pregracke and his successful organization, Living Lands and Waters. With just a dozen full time employees and thousands of volunteers, LL&W has taken out well over a million pounds of garbage and waste out of rivers. This includes 938 refrigerators, 90 bowling balls, 18 porta-potties, 243 toy dolls, 19 tractors, 4 pianos, 63 messages in bottles, 97 toilets, and so much more.

Speaking of toilets, did you know that your sewage gets treated, goes back to Lake Superior, and eventually makes it back to your drinking water? Sewage includes all of your waste water. From the water that goes down the drain to the water that gets flushed down, all of it gets treated at WLSSD or by a similar process.

First, the workers at WLSSD will remove visible solids from the water, and then the real workers come into play. I know this may be hard to believe, but the water is treated by bacteria. The bacteria is given a lot of dissolved oxygen, and starts to eat all of the nutrients. When the bacteria is done, the water is disinfected and returned to the St. Louis River. From there, it flows into Lake Superior, which will eventually make it to another treatment plant, and start the cycle again.

At River Quest, I learned about our habitat and what I can do to protect it. I hope that I can share my knowledge with other young people to help them learn about and help improve our environment. If we all try to do something, such as picking up litter as we see it, or not throwing our apple cores out the window, we can have a huge influence on our environment. A very positive influence.