

## Frequently Asked Questions: Zebra Mussels and Other Aquatic Invasive Species

What are aquatic invasive species (AIS)?

- Aquatic invasive species are non-native organisms that can cause significant harm to an ecosystem when introduced. Aquatic invasive species like quagga mussels and zebra mussels are small organisms that could have huge impacts for Nebraska's waters, boaters, and anglers. They can ruin fisheries, clog cooling systems in motorboats, foul hulls, and ruin equipment.
- Complete information can be found at the Nebraska Invasive Species Project website: <http://snr.unl.edu/invasives>

FAQ's –

1. What are zebra mussels?

- Zebra mussels look like small clams, usually less than an inch long with a D-shaped shell. Usually the shell is yellowish- brown with alternating dark and light stripes.
- Zebra mussels use sticky byssal threads to attach tightly to any hard surface.
- They are from the Black and Caspian Seas

2. Why are zebra mussels a problem?

- Zebra mussels are a problem because they filter water, up to a liter a day, to eat plankton. Although this filtering action may clear up the water, clear water does NOT mean clean water. Zebra mussels will actually select *against* blue green algae – they will not eat it.
- Larval fish and native mussels rely on this same plankton to survive.
- Zebra mussels also clog pipes by forming colonies inside of the pipes. Then the water cannot flow through the pipes as easily.
- They can clog up the cooling systems of boat engines.
- When zebra mussels die, they wash up on the shore, can pile up on beaches and begin to decay. Their shells are razor sharp and can cut bare feet.

4. Are zebra mussels in Nebraska?

- Yes, zebra mussels were found in Offutt Lake in 2006, and a chemical treatment was applied to attempt to eradicate them. However, in the fall of 2010, adult zebra mussels were found again in the lake. Zebra mussels were also found in Zorinsky Lake in Omaha in the fall of 2010. The lake has been drawn down nearly 20ft to expose and freeze the zebra mussels. The lake will remain lowered through most of 2011 to allow for thorough sampling. If no zebra mussels are found, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission will begin restocking the lake with fish in fall 2011.

5. How do zebra mussels spread?

- Transport by people is the primary vector for the spread of zebra mussels to unconnected waters. Boats that move from one water to another without draining

(bilge, live well, etc) can transport zebra mussels as well as a number of other harmful organisms – like fish pathogens.

- When bait buckets are moved from one water body to another
- Zebra mussels can attach to a solid substrate (boat) and can be easily transported on recreational equipment.
- Zebra mussel larvae (veligers) are about the diameter of a human hair and are so small you can't see them without a microscope.
- The veliger floats in a water column for 1-5 weeks and then as it grows it begins to sink and search for a hard surface on which to live and grow.
- It is illegal to release zebra mussels into a waterbody.
- Zebra mussels are NOT likely spread by birds.

**6. How do we control zebra mussels?**

- There are very few successful control methods for zebra mussels in the wild.
- Some chemicals can be used to kill zebra mussels; however, if these chemicals were used in an open lake they would also affect fish and native mussels.
- In Virginia, zebra mussels were eradicated from a small lake. Costly, and detrimental to native mussels, this represents the first and only successful eradication of zebra mussels in the wild.

**7. How can I help prevent the spread of zebra mussels and other aquatic invasive species?**

- The spread of zebra mussels can be prevented by draining all of the water from boats, live wells, and bait wells before entering a new water body.
- Thoroughly inspect your boat's hull and trailer for any zebra mussels and remove.
- Wash equipment with 140-degree water (your local car wash hot water rinse),
- Let equipment sit for 5 days.
- Never take fish or plants from one lake and put them in another.
- Never dip your bait bucket into a lake or river if it has water in it from another waterbody. More information can be found <http://snr.unl.edu/invasives/boater.htm>

**8. What do I do if I find a zebra mussel or other invasive species?**

- If you find a zebra mussel, do not release it back into the water, note the date and the specific location, and contact the Nebraska Invasive Species Project at (402) 472-3133 or email at [invasives@unl.edu](mailto:invasives@unl.edu). You can also report it online at: <http://snr.unl.edu/invasives/hotline.htm>
- Public assistance in reporting zebra mussel sightings at new locations is essential to help prevent its spread to other inland lakes and rivers.

**9. What can I do to help/volunteer?**

- For volunteer opportunities, please visit our [volunteers page](#)

**10. What are some other aquatic invasive species that I should be aware of?**

- Some others include; white perch, Asian carp, rusty crayfish, Asian clams, purple loosestrife, Phragmites (Common Reed), and many others. To see the species of concern in Nebraska, please view our Aquatic Invasive Species Pocket Guide online at: <http://snr.unl.edu/invasives/documents/AISPocketGuideFinalDraft2.pdf>