



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Zebra Mussel



What You Should Know

The first descriptions of zebra mussels were recorded in 1769 and were based on observations made along the Caspian Sea and Ural River, although the species is believed to have originated in Poland. The species gains its name from a striped pattern on its shell. Zebra mussels can grow to a length of about 50 mm and have a lifespan of from 4 to 5 years. Females may produce more than 40,000 eggs in one reproductive cycle. The mussels eventually attach themselves to a hard surface, although they have been known to attach to vegetation as well.

How to Control This Invasive Pest

Several approaches are being tried or tested, with varying measures of success. Methods range from manual removal to the use of steam, chemicals, vibrations, electrical current, filters, ultraviolet light, flushing and introduction of predators, parasites or disease.

The Invasion

Zebra mussels were first discovered in North America in 1986, on the Canadian side of two of the Great Lakes. By 1990, they were reported in all of the Great Lakes. The mussels escaped the Great Lakes shortly thereafter and following introduction into the Illinois River, moved to the Mississippi. By 1994, zebra mussels had been spotted in at least 20 states, extending as far west as Oklahoma. There is wide agreement that the zebra mussel was most likely introduced through ballast water discharge by international freighters that enter the Great Lakes through the St. Lawrence Seaway.

What Can I Do?

It isn't likely you'll encounter the zebra mussel unless you are on a waterway that is infested; should you find them attached to your boat, it is important that they be destroyed upon removal. If you are moving your boat from an infested waterway to one that is not, it is particularly important to conduct a thorough inspection.

Background

Zebra mussels are among the invasives causing serious problems. They are capable of corroding wood, steel and concrete, fouling water intake pipes for industry as well as ship engines, and their weight can sink navigational buoys. They are believed to have a minimal impact on Great Lakes fish populations, but some believe it is too early to gauge their effect. The mussels' only known predators, carp, sturgeon and some diving ducks, have not had a significant impact on the zebra mussel population.

More Information

You can find a wealth of information about this destructive pest along with descriptions of efforts to fight the zebra mussel, on the internet.

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<http://www.fws.gov>