

## Zebra Mussel - (*Dreissena polymorpha*)



Dave Britton, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Asst. Aquatic Nuisance Species Coordinator, Division of Fisheries - Region 2, Department of Biology, University of Texas, Arlington, Texas

Zebra mussels (*Dreissena polymorpha*) are prolific invaders that cost the U.S. billions of dollars and Canada millions of dollars each year. These small mussels originating from Eurasia can clog water intakes and damage equipment by attaching to boat motors and hard surfaces. They can damage ecosystems by impacting the fishery and reducing biodiversity by smothering native mussels and crayfish. The scenic value associated with beautiful beaches is changed by zebra mussels washing up and littering these beaches with their sharp shells, which become a safety concern.

In the late 1980s, zebra mussels spread from Europe to the Great Lakes in contaminated ballast water discharged from foreign ships or from zebra mussels attached to foreign ships. From there, they expanded their range to the Mississippi River, its tributaries, and to inland lakes. Zebra mussels spread primarily by attaching to boat hulls, aquatic plants, nets and fishing equipment. Once introduced zebra mussels can move up streams and river infesting new inland lakes. Boat and trailer traffic along with not cleaning gear used in zebra mussel infested waters has been the major cause for this mussel to move over land. Adult zebra mussels can survive out of water for days under certain conditions. **Your actions are vital to prevent their spread. Please learn about this mussel and how to eliminate this mussel from entering our lakes and rivers within Saskatchewan.**



Photo Credit: Todd Marsee, Senior Graphic Artist, Michigan Sea Grant

## General Characteristics:

- Zebra mussels look like small clams with a yellowish or brownish “D”-shaped shell, usually with dark and light-colored stripes (hence the name “zebra”)
- They can be up to two inches long, but are usually under one inch.
- Zebra mussels usually grow in clusters containing numerous individuals and are generally found in shallow (6-30 feet), algae-rich water
- Zebra mussels are the only freshwater mussel that can firmly attach itself to solid objects – submerged rocks, dock pilings, boat hulls, water intake pipes, etc.
- On smooth surfaces, young zebra mussels feel like fine sandpaper.
- Juveniles are about the size of peppercorns.

## What You Can Do:

- Learn to recognize zebra mussels.
- Inspect and remove aquatic plants, animals, and mud from boat, motor, and trailer.
- Drain water from boat, motor, live well, bilge, and bait containers.
- Dispose of unwanted frozen bait or live bait, such as leeches and crayfish originating from within Saskatchewan, earthworms or night crawlers (stored within a soil-free medium such as shredded paper or peat moss), into the trash.
- Rinse boat and equipment with high-pressure and/or hot water (104°F), especially if moored for over a day in zebra infested waters, OR
- Let all equipment dry for at least 7 days.
- Never introduce fish, plants, crayfish, snails or clams from one body of water to another.



Photo Credit: Kim Bogenschütz, Iowa Department of Natural Resources

## Know the rules!

Specimens are needed to confirm sightings, but some jurisdictions prohibit or discourage possession and transport of zebra mussels and other invasive aquatic plants and animals. In Saskatchewan, possession and transport of any *Dreissena* species is illegal, except when providing them to the Ministry of Environment for identification. Unauthorized introduction of zebra mussels, fish, or plants into the wild is illegal. Protect your property and our waters. If you know of a boat or trailer having zebra mussels please contact the TIP line at 1-800-667-7561 or your nearest Ministry of Environment office or Ron Hlasny, Aquatic Biologist with Fish and Wildlife Branch at 1-306-953-3242.