

Des Moines Register – November 5, 2007

## **Pesky mussels catch a ride to Lake Rathbun**

**Biologists worry about the spread of zebra mussels, which can clog water pipes and threaten native species.**

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**November 5, 2007**

**Biologists who discovered exotic zebra mussels on a boat moored at Rathbun Lake are worried that the invasive species eventually could damage native species and water pipes at the popular southern Iowa recreational lake.**

**Zebra mussels are found widely along the Mississippi River but are confirmed in only two other Iowa waterways, Lake Delhi in Delaware County and Clear Lake in Cerro Gordo County.**

**The thumbnail-sized invaders, which hitch rides in boat ballasts and live wells, clog water intakes, wipe out native mussels, coat boat hoists and take food from small fish species.**

**Iowa biologists found an estimated 100 adult zebra mussels on a cabin cruiser at Rathbun on Oct. 26 but aren't sure whether the tiny pests spread to the lake, said Kim Bogenschutz, coordinator of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources' aquatic invasive species program based in Boone. The boater was not identified but could face a \$100 fine for transporting zebra mussels.**

**The best way to stop the mussels is to drain water from a boat and let it dry for five days. Once in the water, the thumbnail-sized zebra mussels can't be stopped.**

**State environmental leaders pleaded with boaters to help prevent a biological catastrophe.**

**"We cannot allow the careless behavior by a few individuals and businesses to permanently impact a resource used by**

800,000 visitors," DNR Director Richard Leopold said, referring to the possible infestation at Rathbun.

"If these zebra mussels become established here, there is no permanent fix - we will have to learn how to live with this changed ecosystem," he said. "We are looking at any and all enforcement options. Ignorance and carelessness is not an excuse."

Rathbun is a major boating and fishing spot and home to the state's first resort park project, the \$48 million Honey Creek Resort State Park now under construction.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers reservoir on the Chariton River also provides water for the 70,000 customers of one of the largest rural water systems in the country and has a major state fish hatchery. Rathbun is a reservoir on the Chariton River, which feeds into the Missouri River and, eventually, the Mississippi.

That is bad biological news. The invasive mussels are filter feeders, meaning they pull their meals from water that passes through them. While that eating technique can help clear waters, the mussels take food that otherwise would be consumed by small fish and native mussels.

They also smother native mussels, already in sharp decline in Iowa's polluted waters, by covering them in huge mounds.

And the shells of dead zebra mussels can accumulate at beaches, where they can cut swimmers and other recreationalists.

Investigators plan to step up efforts to check for the mussels in Rathbun, Bogenschutz said.

Zebra mussels, originally found in the Great Lakes in 1988, have spread to the entire Mississippi River system in Iowa. The mussels can spawn several times a year, producing up to a million young annually.

The first Iowa lake to confirm the presence of zebra mussels was Clear Lake in 2005. Biologists found two of the tiny mussels in Clear Lake that year, and about a dozen the next

year. This year, the mussels were found across the lake.

"You pick a rock at Clear Lake and you'll probably find a few zebra mussels," Bogenschutz said.

The only other Iowa lake with zebra mussels is Lake Delhi, where biologists found them all across the lake in 2006. The lake is part of the Maquoketa River system, placing that river at risk.

Nationally, the mussels are mostly in the eastern United States, especially the Great Lakes and Mississippi River system. However, the invaders were found in Lake Mead in Nevada this year.

Besides the biological damage, the mussels can damage pocketbooks, too.

Scraping the mussels off intake pipes for water treatment plants can cost thousands of dollars, and that expense gets passed on to water customers.

Power plants and water treatment plants on Lake Erie have reported up to 30 percent cuts in the amount of water they can pump through the mussel-clogged intakes, and have spent up to \$1 million a year on related research and cleanup work, the Iowa DNR reported.

Juvenile zebra mussels, which are too tiny to see, can float downstream, but the only way they get into lakes is by riding in boat ballasts and live wells.

State officials recommend that boat owners drain water from their boats and let them dry for five days before moving the craft to another lake. The mussels have to be wet to live.

Workers will need to do extra work and water treatment to make sure hatchery operations don't spread zebra mussels, said Andy Moore, who supervises hatchery operations at the Rathbun fish hatchery.

State biologists plan to monitor Rathbun Lake, Clear Lake, the Iowa Great Lakes and possibly the federal reservoirs for the species next year.

**An increase in boat license fees provided money for nine seasonal workers who check for invasive species.**

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## **How to Help**

**The Iowa Department of Natural Resources suggests that boaters take these precautions to help keep zebra mussels from infesting Iowa lakes and rivers:**

- Remove any visible plants, animals or mud before transporting equipment.**
- Never release plants, fish or animals into a body of water unless they came out of that water, and empty unwanted bait into the trash.**
- Drain water from all equipment (motor, live well, bilge, transom well) before transporting.**
- Clean and dry anything that comes into contact with water (boats, trailers, equipment, boots, clothing, dogs). Before transporting to another body of water: Rinse your boat and equipment with hot (104-degree)**

water; or  
spray your boat and trailer with high-pressure water at  
a car wash; or  
dry your boat and equipment for at least five days.

**LEARN MORE:** For more information on zebra mussels,  
go to [www.100thmeridian.org](http://www.100thmeridian.org) or [www.iowadnr.com](http://www.iowadnr.com).