

Aquatic Invasive Species

Caryn Miske, Executive Director
Flathead Basin Commission

One of the biggest threats to our waters comes in the form of small organisms and weeds that can best be described as invasive species. Montana lakes provide prime habitat for many non-native species to thrive and take over, limiting habitat for local, native species. It is extremely important to pay attention to invasive “hitchhikers” – especially when boating in different

Source: Amy Benson, USGS, Bugwood.org, 2009



Quagga mussel

waters throughout the state and country.

Source: USGS Archive



Zebra Mussels

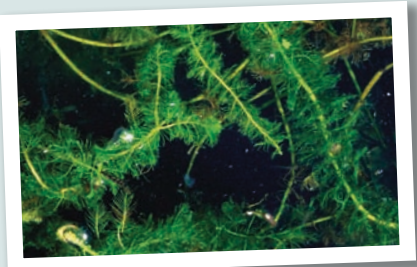
The most notorious aquatic invasive species are the **zebra** and **quagga mussels**. Since their introduction to the Great Lakes in 1986, these mussels have quickly spread and are now found in at least twenty states and two Canadian provinces. The primary way zebra and quagga mussels can spread is on boats trailered by the public or commercial haulers. Zebra mussels can be transported on boat hulls, in water in live wells (as microscopic larvae), and on aquatic plants. A female zebra mussel can release up to one million eggs each season so transporting just one zebra mussel can spell trouble for our waters and your boat.

Eurasian Watermilfoil, an aquatic invasive weed, is extremely aggressive as its dense weed beds grow rapidly, choke out native plants and spread easily to new areas. Once introduced into a river or lake, the watermilfoil rapidly forms thick mats that severely hamper swimming, boating and fishing. On some stretches of the Pend Oreille River in Washington, navigation and recreation have become virtually impossible. Watermilfoil has also caused drownings by tangling swimmers in its thick beds.

Watermilfoil reproduces by a process called “fragmentation.” The plants easily break into small pieces and each piece can form roots. A single wisp can

multiply into 250 million new plants in one year, and can easily spread by boaters unwittingly carrying plant fragments on their hulls and trailers. Watermilfoil currently flourishes in Idaho, Washington and British Columbia, and has recently been found in the Noxon area in Montana. It is a serious threat to our rivers and lakes in the Flathead Basin.

Source: Barry Rice, Bugwood.org



Watermilfoil

Don't pick up aquatic hitchhikers!

ACTIONS YOU CAN TAKE:

For the General Public:

- Learn to identify aquatic invasive species. Your local Weed District and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MT FWP) can assist you.
- Report any suspected sightings immediately to MT FWP.
- Tell your friends about aquatic invasive species.

For Boaters – before launching and before leaving:

1. Inspect your boat, motor, all underwater fittings and trailer, and remove any visible plants and organisms. Put plants in trash on land or in a sealed container.
2. Drain water from your equipment including the motor, bilges, live wells, bait buckets, coolers, etc. Water from one waterbody should never be drained adjacent to or into another waterbody, and live bait should be disposed of in a sealed container on land.
3. After all water is drained, the boat is on the trailer, and before leaving the area, run the engine for 5-10 seconds to blow out excess water that may contain unwanted hitchhikers.
4. Clean boat and equipment with high pressure hot water.
5. Dry everything for at least 5 days.
6. If you cannot perform the above steps, have your boat professionally cleaned before traveling to any other waters.

For Anglers ...

- Avoid felt-soled waders because such boots are notorious for transporting aquatic invasive species.
- Live bait should be disposed of in a sealed container on land.

REMEMBER: IT IS ILLEGAL to transport aquatic invasive species into Montana – even if it's an accident.