

Don't Move a Mussel!

Herb Angell, NGPC Boating Law Administrator

A review of the 2017 Nebraska Lake Association annual Spring Conference agenda shows quite a bit of time devoted to Aquatic Nuisance Species. All the more reason to attend this year's conference. The primary issue that is being discussed in Nebraska recreational boating circles is Zebra Mussels, or *Dreissena polymorpha*, if you are of scientific persuasion. These fingernail sized critters pose a threat to your property values if introduced into your lake. They have been around since they were found in the Great Lakes in 1988 and they have found their way to Nebraska, especially the Missouri River. These invaders could become more widespread than the common carp and cause more economic damage than any other species we have encountered.

Zebra mussels look like small clams with a yellowish-brown D-shaped shell, usually with alternating dark- and light-colored stripes. They can be up to 2 inches long, but most are less than an 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 mollusk that can firmly attach to solid objects such as submerged rocks, dock pilings, boat hulls, aquatic vegetation, and water intake pipes. If you discover zebra mussels, note the date and precise location where they were found. Take one or more mussels with you and store them in rubbing alcohol. **Do not throw them back in the water!**

Do we need to worry? If the zebra mussel's invasion follows the pattern observed elsewhere, the creature's population in Nebraska will peak in a few years. For the zebra mussel, "peak" population is thousands per square foot, covering every inch of solid surface. Zebra mussels can attach to anything firm, including water intakes of power generating plants, municipal water systems, and boats. They can accumulate 6 inches deep, severely reducing the flow of water and posing a multibillion-dollar threat to industry, agriculture, and municipal water supplies. Because of their sheer numbers (females can produce 1,000,000 eggs per season), zebra mussels can smother native freshwater mussel beds. Other wildlife are vulnerable, too. Zebra mussels are filter feeders, gleaning tiny particles of organic food from the surrounding water. Some observers fear they will deplete the supply of food available to shad, paddlefish, and other native species. Add the cost of damage to boats, motors, docks, and other marine equipment, and you have a very expensive scenario.

For the most updated information on Zebra Mussels, from the experts, it seems logical to attend the Nebraska Lake Association Spring Conference.

NLA Zebra Mussel/Invasive Specie Transmission Prevention Document

The impact of an infestation of Zebra Mussels or other Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) to your Lake can be catastrophic! The goal of the Nebraska Lake Association (NLA) is to inform and to educate our Association Members about the threat and methods to prevent the spread of AIS.

The below suggested protocol and recommendations have been developed, reviewed and approved by the NLA and do not supersede your individual HOA rules and regulations:

Lake Management Suggested Protocol

- A. Control Lake access w/ 24/7 locked boat ramp to prevent unauthorized entry.
- B. Be aware/alert of any/all Watercraft (Boat, Jet Ski, etc.) entering {member lake}.
- C. Verify, with approved, informed, and educated key-holders prior to entry.
- D. Require that all Marine Service Providers (MSP) demonstrate proof of: Clean, Drain, Dry and/or proper decontamination (Boat, Trailer, Shorestation, Dock, Dredging, Gear, etc.) when entering {member lake} for service or delivery.
- E. Suggest that you implement (and keep current) a system to register and identify (lot numbers, stickers, NE Boat Registration, etc.) ALL homeowner watercraft.
- F. All watercraft removed from {member lake} will be documented by either a key holder, or a designated homeowner.
- G. All returning watercraft should comply with either:
 - a. Clean, Drain & DRY (5-14 days) Process:
 - b. Demonstrate that a thorough and proper Decontamination has been performed.
- H. The only exceptions to item G above will be:
 - a. For repairs & maintenance (in & out of shop) using clean trailers.
 - b. Proof of professional Decontamination by an authorized Marine Service Provider (MSP) approved by {member lake}.
- I. Restrict access by allowing only homeowner watercraft in {member lake}
- J. Treat and dry all minnow buckets, trailers, kayaks, canoes, paddleboats, stand-up paddle boards, etc. before bringing them into member lake.
- K. Adopt a vigilant and aggressive attitude... agree that anything that comes into {member lake} from any other water source could be potentially infected.
- L. It is up to the homeowners of {member lake} to inform their family, guests and Marine Service Providers of individual {member lake} HOA Rules and Regulations.

Other measures to protect member Lakes

1. Remove plants and animals from your boat, trailer, and accessory equipment (anchors, centerboards, trailer hitch, wheels, rollers, cables, and axles) before leaving the water access area of any lake that you visit with any water toys, bait buckets, etc.
2. Drain Live wells, bilge water, and transom wells before leaving a boat ramp for home. Empty bait bucket on land, never into the water. Never dip your bait or minnow bucket into one lake if it has water in it from another. Also, never dump live fish from one water body into other waters.

Visit neinvasives.com to Prevent, Promote, and Reduce the Impact. KNOW NEBRASKA LAWS!