

FOREIGN INVADER TAKING OVER LAKE?

ZEBRA MUSSELS FOUND IN RATHBUN LAKE

An estimated 100 adult zebra mussels were discovered on a cabin cruiser last Friday that had been moored at a marina on Rathbun Lake since late June. State officials stress that it is too early to tell if the exotic mussel has established a foothold in the 11,000 acre reservoir, but they are taking appropriate precautions.

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) will be monitoring the marina and other areas around the lake over the next few years looking for the presence of juvenile zebra mussels, called veligers.



It is illegal to possess or transport prohibited aquatic invasive species such as zebra mussels in Iowa. Signs are posted at public accesses to identify infested waters. The DNR will be working with the US Army Corps of Engineers to place signs alerting boaters of the potential presence of zebra mussels in Lake Rathbun and to help stop the spread of other aquatic nuisance species.

"We cannot allow the careless behavior by a few individuals and businesses to permanently impact a resource used by 800,000 visitors. If these zebra mussels become established here, there is no permanent fix, we will have to learn how to live with this changed ecosystem," said Richard Leopold, director of the Iowa DNR. "We are looking at any and all enforcement options. Ignorance and carelessness is not an excuse."

The discovery has alarmed local, state and federal officials who rely on the south central Iowa reservoir to provide

drinking water, water for an important fish hatchery, fishing, boating and other recreation. Rathbun Lake generates millions of dollars for the local economy and is the site of the \$50 million

Honey Creek Resort State Park.

Zebra mussels grow to only two or three inches at the largest and live for up to three years. They can spawn within the first year of life and each mussel can produce up to 1 million young and spawn multiple times per year.

Zebra mussels are filter feeders and directly compete with native species, including mussels and fish fry. Zebra mussels adhere



to hard objects and once attached, they usually stay for life. If the densities are high enough, they can smother native mussels by attaching to their shells and can out compete native filter feeding organisms.

Rathbun Lake provides water for the Rathbun Regional Water Association which serves an estimated 70,000 people in southern Iowa and northern Missouri. Zebra mussels can impact water supplies by clogging water intake pipes and requiring millions of dollars for treatment. Their microscopic larvae can pass through many screens intended to keep them out. Millions of dollars are being spent annually by Great Lakes cities and industries to unclog intake pipes and prevent further

infestation.

Rathbun Lake is also one of the Iowa DNR's walleye collection lakes and raises walleyes and channel catfish that are stocked over much of the state. The lake empties into the Chariton River, which is a tributary of the Missouri River.

"It's going to create a lot of headaches in transporting and stocking fish," said Andy Moore, who supervises hatchery operations at the Rathbun Fish Hatchery. Moore said upon discovery, the DNR suspended walleye stocking. He said they will begin treating the water to make sure the hatchery does not transport any zebra mussel or mussel larvae to any other Iowa water body.

"This is an existing treatment that we use at our Fairport Hatchery, but we just don't know the impact it will have on these larger walleye fingerlings," Moore said. It will take about three days to complete the test. The decision

on when to resume stocking is pending. "We know the treatment works. But what we are looking for is any delayed fish mortality."

The impact to the lake itself is unclear.

"We don't know if these things have a toe hold yet or not," said Mark Flammang, fisheries management biologist for Rathbun Lake. "We are treating the lake like it does have a zebra mussel population and we are going to do everything we can to ensure that we don't move any mussels from this lake."



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