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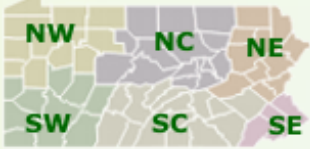
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 7/13/2005

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ZEBRA MUSSELS FOUND IN WARREN COUNTY STREAM

Boaters, Anglers Asked to be Vigilant to Keep Mussels from Migrating

MEADVILLE: Environmental Protection Regional Director Kelly Burch today confirmed that zebra mussels have been found in Conewango Creek in Pine Grove Township, marking the first time a colony of the exotic species has been confirmed in Warren County.

“Zebra mussels have been present in the Great Lakes since the mid-1980s when they were introduced through ballast water from a freighter that had taken on the water in eastern Europe,” Burch said. “Since then, zebra mussels have been transported to many other waterways in the United States and have caused environmental havoc and millions of dollars in property damage.”

DEP biologists discovered zebra mussels (*Dreissena polymorpha*) in the creek near a boat launch area north of Akley last week. Adult zebra mussels are small clam-like animals about the size of a fingernail, but can grow up to be two-inches long. They have a zebra-striped pattern on the shell.

Ever since zebra mussels were discovered in Erie’s Presque Isle Bay in the late 1980s, state and local biologists have monitored Pennsylvania waters to see if the species is spreading. DEP biologist James Grazio, who has studied zebra mussels since they first emerged in the region, says the mussels are very adaptable.

“Zebra mussels have few controlling natural predators and they multiply rapidly,” Grazio said. “They disrupt the food chain by devouring the microscopic aquatic plants that support the existence of native mussels and fish.”

DEP biologist Joe Brancato, who discovered the adult zebra mussels in Conewango Creek, said there are a number of potential ways that the mussels could have been introduced to the stream.

“It’s possible that the zebra mussels came from Chautauqua Lake in New York State,” Brancato said. “Zebra mussels moved into the lake in the mid-1990s, and even though the lake is some 30 miles upstream, the Chadakoin River connects Chautauqua Lake and Conewango Creek. It is also possible that the zebra mussels were introduced to Conewango Creek by a boat that had been used in a body of water where zebra mussels were already established, or by an angler’s bait bucket.”

Adult zebra mussels can attach themselves to the hull of a boat or any hard underwater surface. A boat moving from one body of water to another may also carry zebra mussel larvae (veligers), which can’t be seen by the naked eye but feel like grit or sand on a hard surface. Veligers can survive and be transported in standing water found in the live well, bilge, boat decking, trailer frame or marine toilet.

Boaters, anglers, water skiers, scuba divers and canoeists can take steps to help prevent zebra mussel infestation of uninfested waters:

- Inspect your boat, trailer and all boating equipment that gets wet and remove any plants and animals that are visible before leaving any water body.
- Drain water from the motor, live well, bilge and transom wells while on land before leaving any water body.
- Empty your bait bucket on land before leaving the water body. Never release live bait into a water body, or release aquatic animals from one water body into another.
- Wash/dry your boat, trailer, tackle and other boating equipment to kill veligers not visible at the boat launch. This can be done on your way home or once you have returned home.

Adult zebra mussels can survive 10 to 14 days out of water, so it is important to rinse the boat and equipment that normally gets wet with hot tap water or wash wet gear using a concentration of one-half cup salt to one gallon of hot water. Salt will kill the mussels. However, a thorough rinse with fresh water is needed to prevent damage to gear from the salt. Other methods include spraying the boat and trailer with high-pressure water or drying the boat and equipment for at least five days before launching somewhere else.

In April, a federal court sided with Pennsylvania and the six other Great Lakes states in striking down a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regulation that failed to control the discharge of ballast water from oceangoing vessels.

Pennsylvania, New York, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio and Wisconsin filed an amicus brief in July 2004 to support a lawsuit that challenged EPA's exemption of ballast water from federal Clean Water Act rules. In its April ruling, the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California ordered EPA to repeal its ballast-water exemption.

The vast majority of vessels on the Great Lakes do nothing to inactivate or kill foreign invaders in their ballast water and EPA has set no limits on ballast water discharges. The states backed a lawsuit brought by groups opposing EPA's exemption and petitioned the federal government for stronger action to combat the environmental and economic consequences that harmful invasive species can cause.

DEP recently confirmed that zebra mussel adults and juveniles have been found in Goodyear Lake, the first major impoundment on the Susquehanna River's main stem below Canadarago Lake in New York. This poses a serious ecological and economic threat to the water resources and water users downstream in the river and Chesapeake Bay.

Adult zebra mussels can be found in other Pennsylvania waters, including the Ohio River and lower portions of the Allegheny and Monongahela rivers. Other occurrences of zebra mussels have been reported from northwestern Pennsylvania lakes such as Edinboro and Sandy lakes as well as upper French Creek in Crawford County.

Zebra mussel sightings should be reported to James Grazio at 814-332-6945 in DEP's Northwest Regional Office in Meadville or Tony Shaw at 717-787-9637 in DEP's central office in Harrisburg.

For more information on zebra mussels, visit DEP's Web site at www.dep.state.pa.us, Keyword: "Zebra Mussels."

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