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Zebra Mussels Found in Edinboro Lake, Prevention Measures Outlined

DEP staff this week confirmed the presence of zebra mussels (*Dreissena polymorpha*) in Edinboro Lake, marking the first time the exotic species has been discovered in an inland body of water in Northwestern Pennsylvania.

"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," Regional Director Steven Beckman 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 Water Pollution Biologist James Grazio explained at a lakeside news conference Oct. 16 that he inspected Edinboro Lake on Oct. 12 after receiving a report that a boater had discovered zebra mussels on his boat a few days earlier.

"I found zebra mussels distributed throughout the shoreline area, clinging to stones and docks," Grazio said. "The size of the individual organisms and the density of the zebra mussel colonies suggest that they probably were introduced to Edinboro Lake this year."

Adult zebra mussels are small clam-like animals about the size of a fingernail, but can grow up to 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 was spreading. Erie County Department of Health Biologist Bob Wellington says the mussels are very adaptable.

"Zebra mussels have no controlling natural predators and they multiply very rapidly," Wellington said. "They disrupt the food chain by devouring the microscopic aquatic plants that support the existence of native mussels and fish."

Zebra mussels can settle on any hard surface and rapidly reduce the inside diameter of an intake pipe or fill in the spaces in an outboard motor, blocking the flow of air or water. This can ultimately cause the motor to overheat.

"Boats play a primary role in the spread of zebra mussels," Grazio said. "We suspect that the zebra mussels were transported to Edinboro Lake by a boat that had been used in Lake Erie."

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.

If you use the water as a boater, angler, water-skier, scuba diver or canoeist, there are some important things you can do to help prevent zebra mussel infestation of uninfested waters:

- o 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;
- o Drain water from the motor, live well, bilge and transom wells while on land before leaving any water body;
- o 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;

o 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 either:

1. Rinse your boat and equipment that normally gets wet with hot tap water or wash wet gear using a concentration of ½ cup salt to 1 gallon of hot water. Salt will kill the mussels. However, you must thoroughly rinse with fresh water to prevent damage to gear from the salt; or
2. Spray your boat and trailer with high-pressure water; or
3. Dry your boat and equipment for at least five days before launching somewhere else.

Zebra mussel sightings should be reported to James Grazio of the Northwest Regional DEP Office in Meadville at 814 332-6945 or Tony Shaw, DEP, 717 783-3638.

< > For more information on zebra mussels, visit DEP's website (directLINK "zebra mussels").

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