

Zebra mussel larva found in Kaw Lake

They're small, they barely even move, but they are bad news. Zebra mussels have been discovered in another Oklahoma lake and that has fisheries biologists concerned Zebra mussel larva were recently discovered in Kaw Lake in north central Oklahoma. The unwelcome visitors likely moved down the Arkansas River from Kansas, according to Everett Laney, fisheries biologist with the Tulsa District Corps of Engineers.

Originally from western Asia, these small, rapidly-growing, mussels can cluster together in tightly-grouped colonies.

“This is the first time we have seen them in Kaw Lake, but zebra mussels have been present in the Arkansas River system for ten years now, however this year we have seen a significant increase. In the past we have documented infestations of about 500 zebra mussels per square foot at Robert S. Kerr Lock and Dam, but this year we have seen infestations as high as 12,400 mussels per square foot,” Laney said.

These mussels have proven to have a serious impact on both the environment and on the economy, according to Jeff Boxrucker, senior fisheries research biologist for the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation,

“Nationwide, zebra mussels have a \$3 billion negative impact every year on water users. They can alter native ecological systems and disrupt water withdrawal operations by clogging intake pipes,” he said. “They feed by filtering a tremendous amount of water through their shells. By doing so they are competing with native species for a limited amount of nutrients.”

The mussels could also cause engines to overheat by accumulating in water intakes of inboard and outboard boat motors. Boats should not be left in infested water for extended periods of time. The mussels attach quickly to boat hulls and can affect boat-handling capability, reduce fuel efficiency, and slow speed.

“Unfortunately, there is no feasible means to eradicate zebra mussels from a lake once they have become established,” Boxrucker said. “However, we can take precautions to help prevent the spread of zebra mussels. Probably the most important thing you can do is to wash your boat and flush boat motors with hot, clean water every time you travel to a different lake.”

The Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, the Corps of Engineers, along with several other state and federal agencies and universities have joined together to form a Zebra Mussel Task Force. This task force was formed to unite the efforts of these organizations in stopping the spread of zebra mussels.

In addition to washing your boat off with hot water the Zebra Mussel Task Force . also recommends the following for practices for boaters:

- Drain and dry all live wells, bait buckets and bilge areas.
- Remove any vegetation that is stuck to the boat and trailer.
- Never transfer water or fish between lakes and reservoirs.

For more information about how to stop the spread of zebra mussels or to see a picture of one, log on to the Department's Web site at www.wildlifedepartment.com/mussel.htm.

If you think you may have found a zebra mussel, contact the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation's Oklahoma Fisheries Research Laboratory at (405) 325-7288

Anglers and boaters can also log on to 100thmeridian.org. The 100th Meridian Initiative is a cooperative effort between state and federal agencies to prevent the westward spread of zebra mussels and other aquatic nuisance species in North America.