

## Unwelcome visitors: Be wary of zebra mussels

ANS program has helped keep state free of reproducing mussel populations



Tips  
from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

When I think of mussels, the first thought is something really good to eat. My wife and I are fans of black mussels and New Zealand green mussels. These types of mussels have become so popular that farms are raising them for human consumption.

There is another kind of mussel here in Colorado that is definitely not a welcome visitor. Colorado is home to several species of aquatic nuisance species (ANS) that include the zebra mussel, and the quagga mussel.

Colorado is so serious about keeping these creatures away from the waters of our state that there is a mandatory inspection law in place. You may have noticed the signs if you have visited Blue Mesa or Ridgeway reservoirs in the past. Boaters are all too familiar with these inspections.

All trailered and/or motorized watercraft are required to be inspected by state certified personnel prior to launching in any water of the state, after boating in another state, or after exiting any water in the state which is positive for any ANS.

Zebra mussels are a small freshwater mussel that are not native to our region. Adults are up to 1.5 inches long and have yellow and brown striped shells. These mussels can attach themselves to any hard surface, including boat hulls, props and outboard motors. They can even attach themselves to turtles and other crustaceans.

In areas of the Midwest, where the invasion of zebra mussels can get out of hand at times, they have destroyed boat engines and fouled beaches when they die off. The fecal matter has been known to foul the taste of drinking water sources.

It is believed that zebra mussels arrived in the Great Lakes region of the country somewhere in the early 1980s. Large European ships probably discharged them into our waters via their ballast water pumps. From there,



This is what zebra mussels do to the lower unit on an outdrive, similar to the saltwater barnacles. (Courtesy photo/Colorado Parks and Wildlife)

they have worked their way into the waters of the eastern Mississippi drainage, and in Colorado, Texas, Utah, Kansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma and Nevada.

One of the biggest problems the zebra mussels cause is the filtering out algae that native species, such as juvenile trout, need for food. They also attach themselves to natural mussels and incapacitate them. In waters where power plants operate, these mussels clog water intakes, costing the plants millions of dollars to remove.

Quagga mussels are fingernail sized mollusks that are native to the Ukraine. They were first discovered in the Great Lakes in 1989 near Lake Erie. Zebra mussels are generally limited to the colonization of hard surfaces, the quagga mussels can colonize soft surfaces, such as sand and

silt on the bottom of the lakes.

The quagga mussels do not require as much light as the zebra mussel, which means they can thrive where the zebra cannot. When the two species inhabit the same water, the quagga will usually beat out the zebra.

Like the zebra mussels, the quagga mussels are extremely effective filter feeders, removing large amounts of phytoplankton and algae from the water, depriving native species of much needed food. The real problem with the quagga is that they are very prolific in their breeding. A single female can produce up to a million eggs per year.

There are certain times of the year that Colorado inspectors are over-run with mussel infested boats. Most of these boats are coming from Lake Powell in southern Utah.

Boats are supposed to be inspected as they leave Lake Powell, but inspection stations there are overwhelmed.

Zebra and quagga mussels were first discovered in Colorado, back in 2008. Since then, Colorado Parks and Wildlife has attacked the problem head on with the ANS program for inspections. Because of this program, Colorado remains free of zebra and quagga mussel reproducing populations, while some of our neighboring states without such a program have infestation problems.

In 2019, Colorado state officials conducted 481,543 boat inspections, which was an increase of 7,000 over 2018. A total of 22,947 boats, 281 with attached mussels, were decontaminated, compared with 19,111 in the year 2018.

Unfortunately, the number of fully infested

boats intercepted with mussels continues to increase, indicating that the problem is going to be with us for a while. We saw a 40 percent increase, from 51 boats in 2018 to 86 in 2019. In 2017, only 16 mussel-infested boats were intercepted.

A fully formed adult zebra or quagga mussel has never been detected in Colorado waters. However, the larval stage of mussels, known as veligers, were detected in Green Mountain Reservoir of Summit County back in 2017. CPW is still keeping a close eye on the problem there in an attempt to prevent further growth.

Closer to home, in 2019 CPW performed 18,271 inspections at Blue Mesa Reservoir which led to 625 decontaminations. CPW has authorized 72 locations to perform inspections.

These zebra and quagga mussels are something we

definitely do not want in our beautiful waterways and all of us need to pay special attention to our boats when we travel out of state. In the meantime, I will stick to the black mussels I get at the grocery store and leave the interlopers out of our state.

Mark Rackay is a columnist for the Montrose Daily Press and the Delta County Independent, an avid hunter and world class saltwater angler, who travels across North and South America in search of adventure and serves as a director and public information officer for the Montrose County Sheriff's Posse. For information about the posse call 970-252-4033 (leave a message) or email [info@mcspi.org](mailto:info@mcspi.org)

For outdoors or survival related questions or comments, feel free to contact him directly at his email [elkhunter77@icloud.com](mailto:elkhunter77@icloud.com).



GREAT  
OUTDOORS  
Company



We Have the  
Equipment to  
Get You Out  
There....



10 SOUTH SELIG AVE MONTROSE, COLORADO 81401 970-249-4226