

ZEBRA MUSSEL

Invasive Species

Quick Stats:

Size - up to 1.5 inches in width, but most are about dime-sized

Identification: Zebra Mussels are named for their zebra-like striped pattern that goes across the shell, but this marking is not always present. Unlike native mussels, zebra mussels attach to substrates by filaments called byssal threads.

Habitat: These mussels prefer lakes and rivers such as the Missouri River and attach to practically any stable thing they can find in these bodies of water, from rocks to boats and even other mussels.



Zebra Mussels will attach to anything they can find, from rocks to other mussels.

Reproduction: Zebra Mussels reach sexual maturity before they are one year old. Once a female finds a suitable spot, she will produce up to one million eggs per year. The free-swimming larvae are carried by the Missouri River's current and the population is dispersed.

Diet: Mature Zebra Mussels feed by filtering water through their bodies and extracting the plankton. A Zebra Mussel can filter up to one liter of water per day.

Reasons for Invasive Status: Originally from the seas of Eastern Europe and Central Asia, this species was accidentally brought over by cargo ships coming into the Great Lakes from the Black Sea. Zebra Mussels can spread so quickly because not only do they reproduce in huge numbers, but they can also survive multiple days out of water, allowing them to be transported on boats and other equipment.

It is unclear how to stop Zebra Mussels from spreading once they arrive in an ecosystem. Zebra Mussels were found in Missouri in 1991 in the Mississippi River. By 1999 they spread to the Missouri River near Sioux City, Iowa. They have also been found in the lower Meramec River and the Osage River. They are spreading

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throughout lakes in Missouri too, and have been reported in the Lake of the Ozarks and Bull Shoals Lake.

They cause problems for ecosystems primarily by eating the same food that native fish need to grow, making fish population growth more difficult. Zebra Mussels also cause problems for humans by damaging boat parts and clogging pipes used for water supply. Their sharp shells can litter swimming areas, cutting the feet of beach-goers.

Sources:

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For More Information: This is issue number 7 in volume I of issues all related to the Missouri River. To access the rest of the collection, visit the Missouri River Relief Education page at riverrelief.org. This issue was published in June 2018.