



DANE COUNTY

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Boaters, Fishers, Lake Users Urged to be on Alert for Zebra Mussels; Starting to Impact Dane County Waters

Boaters, fishers, lake users, divers and dock owners on Dane County waters are asked to be on the lookout for zebra mussels.

A zebra mussel was found in Lake Monona in 2001 and follow-up surveys in 2002 revealed several more. They will eventually make their way to Lakes Kegonsa and Waubesa and Yahara and Rock Rivers as their microscopic larvae flow with the current downstream. The Yahara Chain of Lakes has been monitored for several years with the mussels turning up in only Monona. It is not known whether other Dane County lakes are infested.

“Zebra mussels can seriously alter the ecology of a lake. They filter out most of the suspended microscopic plants, animals and debris, consuming the food supply of other organisms, especially young native fish,” said Sue Jones, Dane County Watershed Management Coordinator. “This makes the water clearer, but not *cleaner*, and encourages excessive plant growth.”

Blue green algal blooms may also increase due the presence of zebra mussels. As populations of zebra mussels increase, the infestations can shut down beaches. The edges of zebra mussels are very sharp and can cut exposed skin. The odor alone from decaying mussels washed up on shore can deter one from a beach.

“It is especially important that people look for zebra mussels in Lake Mendota to determine whether it has been infested. When winterizing your boat or removing your pier from any lake this fall, inspect your equipment for zebra mussels,” said Jones.

Officials recommend that lake users learn to identify zebra mussels. They can be up to two inches long, but are usually under an inch and look like small clams with a yellowish or brownish “D” shaped shell with dark and light stripes. They often grow in clusters.

“If your gear feels gritty or grainy, young microscopic mussels may be attached. They are the **ONLY** freshwater mollusks that attach themselves to solid objects,” said Jones.



They attach to just about any unprotected surface including native clams, eventually killing them. Attachment to boats, motors, water intake pipes, pumps, and docks can be not only bothersome, but can require costly repairs. Power and water treatment plants that rely on water from lakes have reported significant reductions in pumping capabilities and spend significant sums of money and time working to remove colonies of zebra mussels.

If you think you've found some or would like identification cards, please call either the Wisconsin Sea Grant Zebra Mussel Watch (920-683-4697) or the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (608-266-9270). They'll want to know the date and exactly where you found them. Store the mussel(s) in either water or rubbing alcohol and refrigerate, if possible, until they are turned in for identification. Whatever you do, DO NOT put the zebra mussel back in the water where you found them or any other water body.

Boaters can unknowingly transport zebra mussels to uninfested waters, as they are invisible in their early stages of life and are easily transported in bait buckets and livewells. When leaving a lake, boaters should inspect their boat, trailer (especially trim tabs, lower units, and underwater fittings) and all equipment and remove any plants and animals. Remember to run your hand over the hull to check for the gritty, grainy feeling. All water from the motor, livewell, bilge and transom should be drained on land. Unwanted bait should be disposed of in the trash and water from bait buckets should be emptied on land. Dry all equipment in the sun for several days before going to another lake. If you are going to another lake sooner than that, go to a car wash and use the hot water, high-pressure sprayer to wash your boat, trailer and equipment.

Check out www.co.dane.wi.us/commissions/lakes for more information on zebra mussels and other invasives. Watch cards with pictures for identification are available from Sea Grant and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Call the numbers above, or go to the Dane County Lakes and Watershed Commission's website (url above) for links to Sea Grant and the DNR.

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