

## Zebra Mussels Frequently Asked Questions

*Zebra mussels hurt aquatic life, damage boats, and even affect our water supply. Protect our lakes—always clean, drain and dry your boat and gear.*

### What are zebra mussels?

Zebra mussels, are invasive freshwater mollusks native to Eastern Europe. The shells are triangular, smooth or shallowly ridged, and can vary in color from solid light to dark-brown or have alternating dark and light stripes. Mussels range in size from microscopic larvae to about 1.5 inches. The microscopic larvae can reside in any amount of standing water or stick to flat surfaces.



### Where are zebra mussels native, and where were they first found in the U.S.?

Zebra mussels are native to the Black and Caspian Sea drainages in Eurasia. In 1988, zebra mussels were first discovered in the Great Lakes. It is believed they were brought to the United States on the anchors of trans-oceanic ships and/or from their water (ballast) discharges. Within a few years, they had spread throughout the Mississippi River.

### What are the environmental impacts of zebra mussels?

Zebra mussels are filter feeders which consume large quantities of plankton. As a result, the ecological balance of an entire waterbody can be disturbed, displacing native species and sport fish.

### What are the economic impacts of the zebra mussels?

They clog pipes and intakes impeding distribution of municipal water supplies, agricultural irrigation, and power plant operation. Zebra mussels also cause damage to recreational areas by encrusting docks and beaches, and colonizing on boating equipment such as watercraft hulls, engines, and steering components.

# zebra mussels

## **What are the impacts and threats of the zebra mussels?**

Zebra mussels can inhabit several types of water from fresh to brackish or even estuarine to causing ecological imbalance. They can clog Intakes and water supply systems. Zebra mussels also have the potential to impact the performance of watercraft by attaching themselves to the motor, propellers and jamming steering equipment.

## **How are zebra mussels spread?**

In addition to naturally flowing downstream, zebra mussels are spread by humans who move objects, such as boats, (where mussels attach themselves) to other bodies of water. Adult zebra mussels can survive out of water for a week or longer (up to a month under ideal conditions), and the microscopic larvae can be transported in water in bilges, ballasts, live wells, or any equipment that holds water.

## **How did zebra mussels get to Texas?**

It is suspected that zebra mussels were brought to Texas on the hull of a recreational boat. Studies show the risk of birds transporting zebra mussels is extremely low. Catfish often eat them, and since zebra mussels can pass through their digestive tracts unharmed, they are easily transported.

## **When were zebra mussels found in Texas?**

Zebra mussels were first discovered in 2009 in Lake Texoma in the Red River Basin. They have since continued to spread downstream as well as to other river basins by overland transport on boats.

## **How can we get rid of them?**

Eradication of zebra mussels is virtually impossible, although in certain cases Texas and local agencies have taken steps to prevent them from becoming fully established. Preventing spread is the best course of action. However, since their larvae are free drifting, preventing their spread downstream from known infestations may not be possible.

# zebra mussels

## **What is being done in response to zebra mussels?**

Public awareness campaigns have been funded to inform boaters about the pathways and consequences of transporting zebra mussels. Local, state, and federal agencies monitor for early detection of new infestations. Seasonal, roving inspectors help to conduct outreach to boaters and marinas to reduce the risk of spread.

## **Why isn't recreational access restricted for bodies of water known to be inhabited with zebra mussels?**

Closure of infested waters could have devastating economic impacts upon a waterside community. Texas Parks and Wildlife (TPWD) works with the authority in charge of each infested area to implement signage alerting boaters zebra mussels are present in the water and boats must be "Clean, Drained, and Dried" after each use.

## **Do all watercraft, including kayaks, inflatables, and fishing gear need to be cleaned between waterbodies?**

Yes. CLEAN, DRAIN, and DRY all surfaces that contact water after every use.

## **Are zebra mussels edible?**

Consumption is not recommended. Zebra mussels are filter feeders and can accumulate pollutants that may not be healthy for people to eat.

## **Can zebra mussels hurt you?**

Zebra mussels are quickly becoming a water hazard you need to look out for in several state lakes. Swimmers and skiers are reporting getting seriously hurt because the gashes mussels cause can be deep.

## **Can I keep a zebra mussel with me?**

Possession or transportation of zebra mussels is illegal. Violations are class C misdemeanors for the first offense, punishable with a fine of up to \$500.

This FAQ's were compiled with information provided by:

Texas Parks and Wildlife

Texas Invasive Plant and Pest Council

National Invasive Species Information Center

