

News Release

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Lone Zebra Mussel Found in Lake Texoma

AUSTIN — For the fifth time in four years, an alert citizen has assisted Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) and the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation (ODWC) in their efforts to keep zebra mussels from invading Lake Texoma.

On April 3 Brent Taylor, an employee of a private landowner on the south shore of Lake Texoma, reported to TPWD Inland Fisheries biologist Bruce Hysmith that he had found a suspected zebra mussel on a boathouse communication line under water.

The find marks the first time the dangerous exotic species has been found living in Lake Texoma. It is known to occur at several other sites in Oklahoma.

TPWD personnel confirmed the identification and inspected the boathouse but found no additional specimens.

Hysmith immediately notified the local U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at Tishomingo, Oklahoma; local game wardens and area marinas to be on the alert.

In 2006, Texas appeared to dodge a bullet when Tim Ray, an employee of a marina in Pottsboro, found zebra mussels on a boat that had been brought from Wisconsin. In 2007 Ray again found zebra mussels on a boat from the Ohio River. Both boats were decontaminated before being put into the water.

In 2008 Marty Ulmer, an employee of a Denison marina, found zebra mussels on a boat arriving from Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin. In 2009 Bobby Vaughn, an employee of another Denison marina, found zebra mussels on yet another boat from Wisconsin. Both boats were decontaminated prior to launching into Lake Texoma.

In all these instances the individuals stated that they were previously aware of the threat from zebra mussels and made a practice of watching out for them.

Zebra mussels are native to Asia and were first found in the United States in 1988. They have since spread to 24 states from Michigan to West Virginia to Oklahoma to California.

The aquatic invaders are about 5/8-inch long and usually have striped shells. They can live for several days out of water and can be dispersed overland by trailered boats, though their main method of spread is by free-floating larvae.

Zebra mussels can multiply rapidly to the point of clogging water treatment plant intake pipes, fouling boat bottoms and possibly depleting food sources that fish and other aquatic species depend on.

The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) nonindigenous aquatic species web site calls zebra mussels "one of the most important biological invasions into North America." That site contains photographs and information that can be used to identify the organisms. Experts say public education is the key with problems like zebra mussels. Only through the vigilance of people like Taylor and Ray and the thousands of anglers and boaters on the water daily can the threat from invasive aquatic species be stymied.

"Biologists and game wardens can't be everywhere," said Phil Durocher, director of TPWD's Inland Fisheries Division. "We need all anglers, boaters and other recreational users of our lakes to watch for zebra mussels and contact their local biologist, game warden or lake controlling authority if they think they've found one."

"Texas and Oklahoma are working jointly on this issue because of the danger these invaders could spread to other water bodies," said Barry Bolton, Chief of Fisheries for ODWC. "We are asking our recreational users to be vigilant not just on Lake Texoma but on other lakes in Texas and Oklahoma as well."

If you find a suspected zebra mussel, here are the numbers to call:

In Texas-(800) 792-4263

In Oklahoma-(405) 521-3721

On the Net:

<http://nas.er.usgs.gov/>

http://www.protectyourwaters.net/hitchhikers/mollusks_zebra_mussel.php