



PLACE INVADERS

*Montanans
can stop
the spread
of aquatic
invasive
species*

Think about how you use water. Outdoor enthusiasts float downriver, motorboat across lakes and reservoirs, and fish for trout and walleye. Farm and ranch communities irrigate crops and water livestock. Many households rely on water from rivers and lakes for drinking water and hydropower dams to generate electricity. Now think about what you would do if the water you enjoy and rely on was infested with weeds, carried diseases or was covered with invasive mussels. Collectively, these invasive plants, animals and diseases are called Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS), and Montana is determined to protect our precious water resources from their devastating impacts.

When a plant or animal enters a new geographic area outside of its native range, the results can be devastating. With no natural predators, these invaders can rapidly reproduce and overwhelm the plants, animals and fish that normally live in that waterbody. Once an invasive species establishes in a new area, it's nearly impossible to eradicate.

One of the most devastating AIS is the zebra or quagga mussel. These freshwater mussels, native to the Black and Caspian seas, made their way to the U.S. in the ballast water of cargo ships transporting goods to the Great Lakes. Since that first detection of mussels in the 1980s, mussels have spread

overland, hitching rides on trailered watercraft.

Zebra and quagga mussels have no natural predators in North America and can multiply rapidly. Each female can spawn 1 million eggs each season. The most alarming feature of these mussels is their ability to attach to any underwater surface using tiny hairs called byssal threads. Imagine millions of thumbnail-size mussels covering hydro-power dams, encrusting the hull and propeller of boats, plugging irrigation and water pipes, and covering docks and shorelines.

To make matters worse, the larval stage of mussels is so small you need a microscope to see them, and they can be transported in any standing water.

Mussels are filter feeders, which means they draw in huge amounts of water to filter out plankton as food. This mines the bottom out of the food chain, essentially stealing the food that fish and other water organisms need to survive.

Adult mussels can survive out of water for up to 30 days and like to attach in hidden places found on boat hulls, propellers, or anchors. Mussel larvae can be transported undetected in any standing water, such as bilge and ballast water, and in live wells or bait buckets.

Montana has implemented rules to stop the transport of AIS on watercraft (see side bar.) Montana has been waging a battle against weeds such as spotted knapweed and leafy spurge for many years. But how much do you know about the weeds of the water such as Eurasian watermilfoil, curly leaf pondweed and flowering rush.

These invasive water weeds can take over an area, pushing out native plants, and reduce fish spawning and foraging habitat. In some waterbodies, the weeds are so dense they prevent boating, fishing and swimming.

People can inadvertently transport weeds that get stuck on boat propellers, trailers and fishing gear. Just a fragment of Eurasian watermilfoil dropped into a new waterway can start an invasion. Water gardeners can also introduce invasive weeds by planting non-native species that will spread and overtake an area.

What You Can Do

Boaters: Whether you have a motorboat, jet ski, drift boat, kayak, or raft, make sure your watercraft is clean, drained and dry before transporting.

Anglers: Make sure your fishing nets, lines and gear are clean, drained and dry. Never transport live fish to a new waterbody. Never dump bait fish in the water; dispose unused bait on land in the trash. Wading anglers need to ensure waders and boots are clean and dry. To prevent the spread of tiny AIS, allow waders to completely dry out (use two pairs), put them in the freezer overnight, or use chemicals like bleach to clean them.

Agricultural producers and irrigators: If purchasing used irrigation pumps, pipe or gear from out of state, have it thoroughly inspected before using. Montanans who work on the land can be the first to notice new infestations. If you suspect something, report it to Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks.

Aquarium owners: If you can no longer care for your aquarium pets, try to find another owner, donate them to a pet shop or humane center, or humanely euthanize them. Never dump aquarium animals, plants or water into natural waterways.

Water gardeners: Make sure you plant only species native to Montana. Do not plant prohibited species, and whenever possible, use native plants and animals for your pond or garden.

Hunters: Clean off plants, animals and mud from waders, hip boots, ATVs, push poles, waterfowl decoys and decoy lines before leaving the water way. Brush hunting dogs and rinse kennels with tap water. When building blinds, use only vegetation found locally and do not transport that material when you leave.

In Montana, we treasure our water resources. It's up to everyone to help maintain this valuable resource. Whether rowing a boat or pumping water into an irrigation system, practice Clean, Drain, Dry. Our economy and the health of our fisheries and water-based infrastructure depends on it. Learn more at www.CleanDrainDryMT.com or call Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks at 406-444-2440. ■



These are the simple steps everyone can take to stop the spread of AIS.

Clean. After recreating or working in a waterbody, completely remove all plants, animals, mud, and standing water from the vessel and equipment. Inspect the boat, trailer, and all gear. Pay close attention to crevices and hidden areas.

Drain. Drain or remove water from the boat, bilge, pipes, live wells, engine, internal compartments and bait buckets before leaving the waterbody. Standing water is particularly worrisome because some invasive organisms are microscopic for at least part of their developing lives.

Dry. Aquatic invaders can only survive in water and wet areas. Drying watercraft, fishing gear and equipment thoroughly, if given enough time, will kill aquatic invasive species.

MONTANA'S AIS RULES

When transporting watercraft in Montana, you are required to:

- Stop at all open watercraft inspection stations as directed by signs.
- Upon entering the state, all watercraft must be inspected before launching.
- When traveling west over the Continental Divide into the Columbia River Basin, all watercraft must be inspected before launching.
- Inspections are required for all watercraft coming off Tiber and Canyon Ferry reservoirs.
- Ensure that watercraft is clean, drained and dry before transporting.

