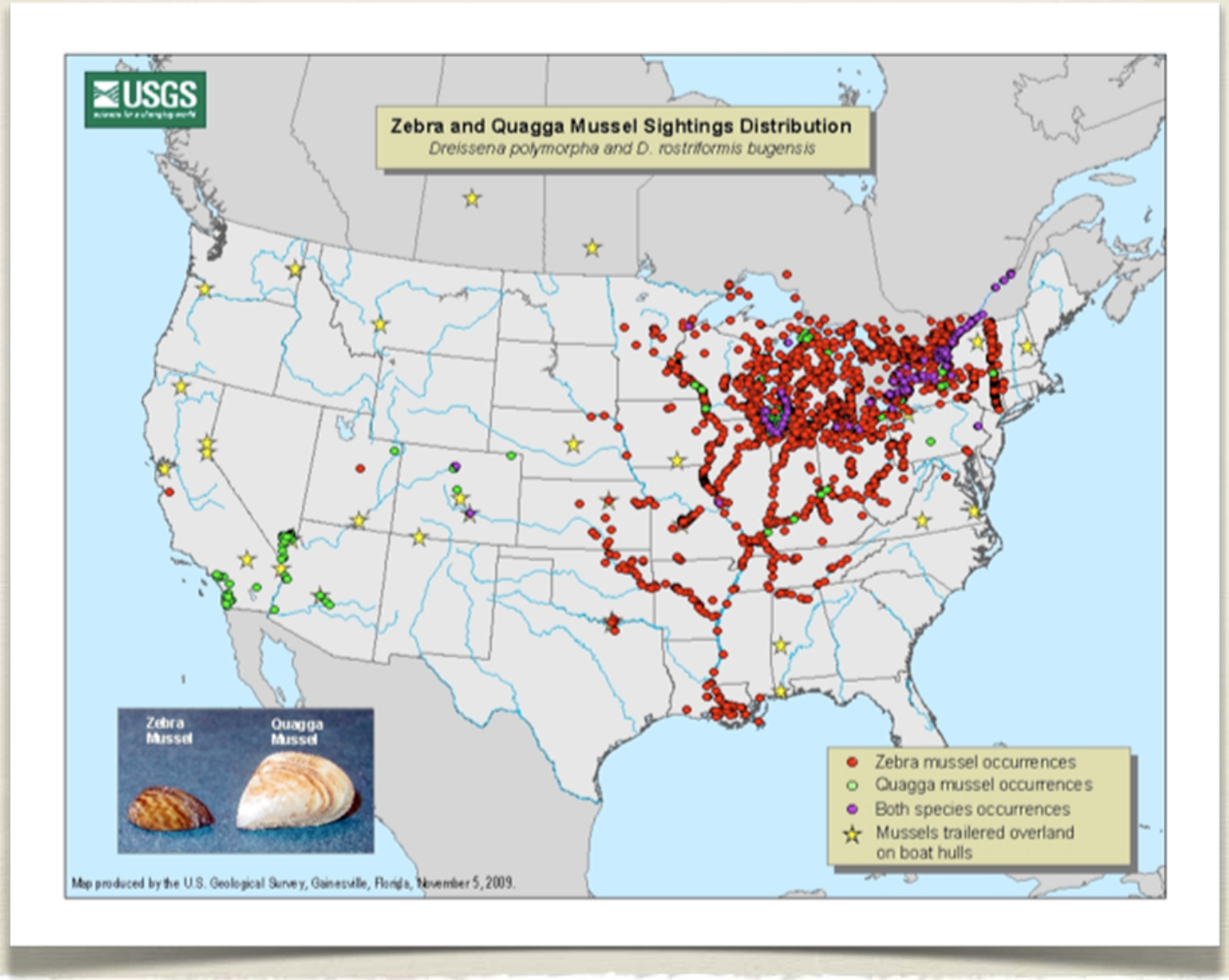
Zebra Mussels

Learn how to help prevent the spread of this aquatic invasive

Since their introduction into the Great Lakes in 1988, zebra mussels, a nonindigenous aquatic species, have expanded their range south to the Gulf and west to California.



A temperate, freshwater species, zebra mussels have spread to many other lakes and rivers in the US and Canada. Remarkable eaters, they filter out nearly all the phytoplankton (and small zooplankton) . By removing most of the food for microscopic zooplankton and filter feeders, which in turn support larval and juvenile fishes and other animals, zebra mussels can effectively starve the native populations of infested lakes and rivers. Lakes that were full of phytoplankton before zebra mussel infestation are devoid of the algae afterwards.

Zebra mussels feed by drawing water into their bodies and filtering out most of the suspended microscopic plants, animals and debris for food. This process can lead to increased water clarity and a depleted food supply for other aquatic organisms, including fish. The higher light penetration encourages growth of rooted aquatic plants which, although creating more habitat for small fish, may inhibit the larger, predatory fish from finding their food. This thicker plant growth can also interfere with boaters, anglers and swimmers.

Zebra mussel infestations may also promote the growth of blue-green algae, since they avoid consuming this type of algae but not others.

Zebra mussels grow rapidly to about thumbnail size, mature within a year, and reproduce prolifically. An adult female can produce 30,000-100,000 eggs each year!

Threat to Outdoor Recreation

Shells of zebra mussels foul beaches and near-shore swimming areas. Bare feet are at risk from the sharp shells, and clean up costs are high. Due to changes in fish populations, zebra mussels also adversely impact recreational fishing.

Zebra mussels on Luna Pier beach, Monroe County, Michigan.

Windrow of zebra mussels at Maumee Bay State Park, following Lake Erie seiche. (Lucas County, Ohio)

Below is a list of the lakes and rivers here in Lake County that are known to have populations of Zebra Mussels

Mussels

Lake/Stream	Zebra mussel	Comments
Acorn Pond	TRUE	Live; collected
Bangs Lake	TRUE	Found in 2003
Bluff Lake	TRUE	
Cedar Lake	TRUE	Found in 2003-dead shells on beach
Channel Lake	TRUE	
Des Plaines River	TRUE	
Diamond Lake	TRUE	Found in 2008
Druce Lake	TRUE	Shells on boat
Dunn's Lake	TRUE	
East Loon Lake	TRUE	On plants; not collected
Fox Lake	TRUE	
Fox River	TRUE	
Gages Lake	TRUE	Found in 2001
Grass Lake	TRUE	
Independence Grove	TRUE	
Lake Catherine	TRUE	
Lake Marie	TRUE	
Lake Matthews	TRUE	
Lake Michigan	TRUE	
Lake Minear	TRUE	Found in 2002
Lake Zurich	TRUE	Found in 2002
Nippersink Lake	TRUE	
Petite Lake	TRUE	
Pistakee Lake	TRUE	
Redhead Lake	TRUE	
Slocum Lake	TRUE	Found in 2007
Spring Lake	TRUE	
Sterling Lake	TRUE	Found in 2001
Third Lake	TRUE	Found in 2003
Tower Lake	TRUE	Found in 2003
West Loon Lake	TRUE	Found in 2001

lakes in red are part of the Fox River Chain 'O Lakes

Protect Your Waters

- Follow a general set of procedures every time you come in contact with any body of water. By doing so, you can protect your waters from harmful aquatic hitchhikers. Because you never know where a nuisance species has been introduced, but has yet to be discovered.

Stop Aquatic Hitchhikers

- There are hundreds of different harmful species ranging from plants, fish, amphibians, crustaceans, mollusks, diseases or pathogens. Some organisms are so small, you may not even realize they are hitching a ride with you. So, it is important to follow this general procedure every time you leave any body of water and travel to another.

Remove mud, dirt, sand, and all visible plants, fish and animals: Inspect and clean all equipment that comes into contact with the water. Remove debris from nets, dock lines, anchors, rods, reels, and the rollers on your trailer. Also, eliminate water from all equipment. Empty all water from canoes, kayaks, and float tubes.

Clean your equipment

- Immature zebra mussels are microscopic and will escape inspection.
- Rinse your gear with hot water (greater than 104° F, 140° F is preferable). High pressure washing can be effective, however, resist the temptation to take your boat to the local carwash. Clean your equipment at the launch, the lake, or streamside. Equipment that is sensitive to hot water can be soaked for 20 minutes in a 100% solution of vinegar. Alternatively, you can soak equipment in a 1% salt/water solution (2/3 cup of salt in 5 gallons of water) for 24 hours.

Dry your equipment

- Allow for 5 days of drying time before entering new waters. Drying equipment in full sunlight is preferable.

What you do makes a difference !

When we use our waters for recreational purposes we are all potential couriers of invasive species !