

Zebra mussel

(*Dreissena polymorpha*)

High priority AIS present in
Lower Wisconsin River basin

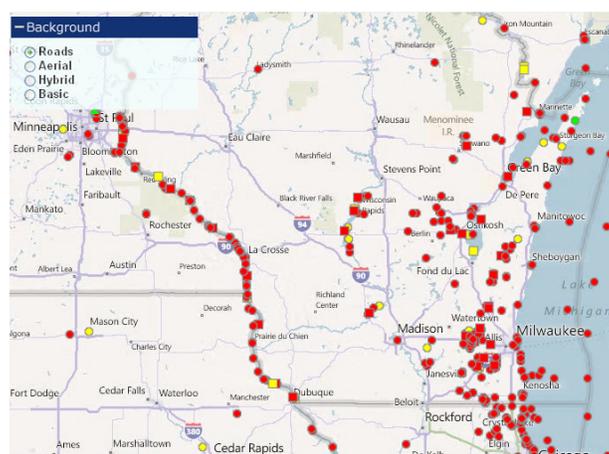
What is it?

Zebra mussels are small shellfish that can grow to 2 inches in length. Color patterns can vary to the point of having only dark or light colored shells and no stripes. They are typically found attached to objects, surfaces, or each other by threads underneath the shells. Although similar in appearance to the quagga mussel, the two can be distinguished. When placed on a flat surface, zebra mussels are stable on their flattened underside while quagga mussels, lacking a flat underside, will fall over.

Where is it?

Zebra mussels are native to the Black, Caspian, and Azov seas. By 1990, zebra mussels had been found in all the Great Lakes. The following year, zebra mussels escaped the Great Lakes basin and found their way into the Illinois River leading to their introduction into the Mississippi River drainage.

As of 2003, their distribution included the entire Wisconsin portion of the Mississippi River, extending up to Stillwater, MN and the St Croix River. In 2008, they were found by Alliant Energy and citizen monitors at the Prairie du Sac Dam on turbines and sampling plates upstream in Lake Wisconsin. Since, they have been detected immediately downstream of the dam and at the Orion mussel bed attached to native mussels. They have also been reported in 139 other inland lakes and rivers in Wisconsin.



Regional Wisconsin distribution of zebra mussels. The locations of several zebra mussels found in the Lower Wisconsin River not shown on map. Red=established population, yellow=specimen(s) collected, green=population unknown. (USGS, 2011)

How does it spread?

Zebra mussels were likely introduced to North America in the ballast water of ships traveling to the Great Lakes. Secondary spread has been the result of it being transported by recreational boaters, both adult mussels and their larvae (veligers).

Why do we care?

Zebra mussels pose a serious threat to the diverse native mussel populations of the Lower Wisconsin River, can pollute the popular beaches and sandbars of the river, and can easily be spread to surrounding waterbodies via boaters. According to research conducted by the University of Wisconsin-Madison Center for Limnology, the majority of nearby lakes, including Devil's Lake and the Madison lakes are susceptible to zebra mussel colonization. Once established, zebra mussels could cause an increase in utility rates throughout the region through their potential to clog intake pipes, turbines, and other equipment.

What can we do?

Containment is the best approach. Increased efforts to educate boaters about the new AIS transport laws and enforcement of these laws are needed. Clean Boats, Clean Waters inspections should continue to be conducted at heavily used landings. Boat washing stations could be a viable option at landings on Lake Wisconsin and below the dam on the Lower Wisconsin River, in locations such as the VFW landing in Prairie du Sac. To eradicate zebra mussels (and properly wash gear and watercraft), they should be exposed for a prolonged period of time to high-pressure water at a temperature above 140°F.

STOP AQUATIC HITCHHIKERS!

Wisconsin law requires you to:

- **Inspect** boats, trailers, and equipment.
- **Remove** all attached aquatic plants and animals.
- **Drain** all water from boats, vehicles and equipment.
- **Never move** plants or live fish away from a waterbody.

If you suspect that you have found an invasive species call 1-888-WDNR-INFO (1-888-936-7463) to report it.



Zebra mussels (USGS)