

DOs and DON'Ts: MANAGING ZEBRA MUSSELS AND AQUATIC PLANTS

Last fall - despite best efforts to prevent their spread - the invasive zebra mussel made its presence in the Iowa Great Lakes known. Hundreds if not thousands of adult shells could be seen crusted along dock posts and boat hoists removed from the lakes for winter storage. According to experts, they are here to stay - at least for now - as to date there is no known solution to stop their spread once reproducing populations are established.

Zebra mussels can cause problems for lakeshore residents and recreationists by attaching to boat motors and boat hulls, reducing performance and efficiency, and by attaching to rocks, swim rafts and ladders where swimmers can cut their feet on the mussel shells. They can also clog water intake pipes, impacting irrigation and increasing the cost of treating drinking water.

Ironically, zebra mussels also have benefits. As filter feeders, they remove algae and increase water clarity. In turn, improved water clarity will increase aquatic plant growth. This is good for fish who hide and lay eggs in plants, and who feed off of the smaller fish and invertebrates that also find food and shelter in underwater plants. Aquatic plants are also good for water quality by keeping bottom sediments stable, preventing turbidity. On the other hand, increased aquatic plant growth can interfere with boating, creating new management challenges.

DOs and DON'TS

The Iowa DNR and local drinking water utilities join together to remind the public that application of aquatic pesticides to control zebra mussels or aquatic plants by homeowners in our lakes is unsafe and illegal. Application of such chemicals is only allowed in special circumstances and they cannot be applied by the public. A strict permitting process is in place to protect human and environmental health. In addition, application of restricted use pesticides can only be performed by licensed applicators. Mechanical removal of cutting of aquatic plants by private landowners, however, is allowed under Iowa Administrative Code (IAC 571 Chapter 54) but must be restricted to a 15 foot width. For more information, please contact Michael Hawkins, Iowa DNR, at 712-336-1840.