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State Officials Take Steps to Contain the Commonwealth's First Confirmed Infestation of Zebra Mussels

Following discovery in a Berkshire lake, Department of Conservation and Recreation and Department of Fish and Game step up public education to prevent the spread of this destructive invasive species

BOSTON - The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) has confirmed the presence of zebra mussels, a highly aggressive aquatic invasive species, at Laurel Lake in Lee and Lenox. In keeping with the agency's invasive species protocol, DCR notified the Department of Fish and Game's (DFG) Office of Fishing and Boating Access (OFBA), which today closed the lake's public access boat ramp temporarily on an emergency basis.

Under Massachusetts regulations, the OFBA has authority to close state boat ramps for not more than 45 days if it finds that the immediate establishment of management measures is necessary for the public health, safety or general welfare. Zebra mussels, which significantly alter lake ecology and cause adverse impacts on animals, humans and boats, can be unknowingly transported from one lake to another by boaters.

Closing the boat ramp provides a safeguard while DCR and DFG determine more definitively the scope and severity of the zebra mussel infestation in Laurel Lake, the level of risk that exists regarding transport of the mussels to other state water bodies, and appropriate management measures going forward. DCR will spearhead a thorough survey of Laurel Lake and surrounding Massachusetts water bodies during the next week. The OFBA's closure cannot extend beyond 45 days without additional public notice and opportunity for public comment.

"We take the threat of zebra mussels very seriously," said DCR Commissioner Richard K. Sullivan Jr. "We need to determine the extent of the infestation as quickly as possible, and do everything we can to prevent it from spreading further. For that, we need the cooperation of

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the public. Temporary closure of the boat access ramp will prevent the chance of accidentally spreading this species by boats put in and taken out of Laurel Lake while we make the boating public aware of the preventive measures they need to take.”

Zebra mussels have been found in numerous bodies of water in the United States, including the entire Great Lakes region and lakes and rivers in nearby Connecticut, New York, and Vermont. This is the first time they have been documented in a Massachusetts lake. In addition to Laurel Lake, several other lakes in Berkshire County have calcium concentrations high enough to support breeding populations of zebra mussels and DCR will focus its surveys on those water bodies.

Nationally, taxpayers spend billions of dollars a year to control zebra mussel infestations. Considered among the country’s most significant invasive species, the mussels out-compete juvenile fish for food and clings by the thousands to virtually everything in a water body - including docks, boats, other aquatic organisms, and various water intake pipes and instruments. Microscopic juvenile zebra mussels can get into boat cooling systems and other water intakes and grow, completely clogging these systems.

The zebra mussel is a freshwater bivalve mollusk that looks like a small clam with a yellowish or brownish shell shaped like the letter “D.” Typically an inch or less in size, they have been found in numbers as high as 750,000 individuals per square meter. Their razor-sharp shells wash up on shore, creating a safety hazard for beachgoers. Once zebra mussels occupy a lake, there is no proven method of eradicating them. However, the spread to other bodies of water can be prevented.

In 2005, DCR developed a Rapid Response Plan for The Zebra Mussel, which focused on public education, and preventing and/or slowing the spread of the mussels from one body of water to another. The plan directs the state to take steps to minimize the transport of the mussels when infestation is extensive. Steps may include “screening of outlets, curtaining of interbasin channels and preventing human use of the body of water.”

To view DCR’s Rapid Response Plan [click here](#).

DCR’s Lakes and Ponds Program conducts ongoing zebra mussel education, outreach and monitoring, and has trained volunteers to collect samples to monitor the species. It was a DCR-trained volunteer who first detected zebra mussels in Laurel Lake last week. The DCR program includes informative boat ramp signage and an educational brochure on zebra mussels.

DCR and DFG recommend that boaters who have boated in an infested lake thoroughly drain, flush, clean and dry their boat and all recreational equipment before launching it in any other lake. This includes the boat engine, bilge, ballast water, or anything else that has come into contact with the water. Boaters should use a bleach solution along with high-pressure hot water, and dry the boat for at least one week in dry weather and up to 30 days in cool, wet environments.

Through the OFBA, Laurel Lake – primarily habitat for warm water fish such as bass, pickerel, sunfish and perch – provides the public with shore fishing opportunities, a paved boat ramp, and parking for about 15 automobiles with trailers at the access facility off Laurel Street (Route 20) in Lee. A popular fishing location, the lake is stocked with brook, brown, rainbow and tiger trout by DFG’s Division of Fisheries & Wildlife each spring and fall. It is one of six western district lakes and ponds stocked with broodstock Atlantic salmon, and among 16 western district lakes included in the fall stocking program. Laurel Lake’s shoreline is 30 to 40 percent developed, and includes some municipal land (town of Lenox).

For more information on zebra mussels, [click here](#).

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