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- Quick Access
Calendar of Events
Economic Development Assistance
DEP Accomplishments
DEP Programs (A-Z)
Environmental Complaints
Forms & Publications
Grants & Loans
Newsroom
Permits, Licensing & Certification
Public Participation
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Links: Northeast, Northcentral, Northwest, Southeast, Southcentral, Southwest

- Links
Education & History
Employment & Careers
Mapping
Technical Guidance
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
7/15/2004

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PENNSYLVANIA, GREAT LAKE STATES JOIN TO URGE FEDERAL ACTION ON INVASIVE SPECIES

Coalition Of State Officials Cite Ongoing Environmental, Economic Damages

Zebra Mussels Recently Found on Susquehanna River's Main Stem, Posing Serious Threats to Downstream Waters & Chesapeake Bay

HARRISBURG: On behalf of Governor Edward G. Rendell, Environmental Protection Secretary Kathleen A. McGinty today announced that Pennsylvania and the Great Lakes states have petitioned the federal government for stronger action to control discharges of ballast water from oceangoing vessels to combat the environmental and economic consequences of harmful invasive species in American waterways.

“Failure to act will have serious environmental and economic repercussions on a Great Lakes ecosystem that is used by millions of people for energy, recreation, agriculture, industry and transportation,” Secretary McGinty said. “Many of these invasive species pose serious threats because of their potential to foul industrial facilities and plug public water supply intakes that draw from infested waters. Invasive species even can interfere with the operation of locks and dams on rivers, or damage boat hulls and engines.”

According to petitions filed by Pennsylvania, New York, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio and Wisconsin, the vast majority of vessels on the Great Lakes do nothing to inactivate or kill foreign invaders in their ballast water and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has set no limits on ballast water discharges.

These exotic species—including zebra mussels, which recently have begun to spread downstream from infested lakes in New York, threatening the Susquehanna River—multiply at fantastic rates and overwhelm ecosystems. The problem costs Great Lakes communities billions of dollars in damages each year. Invasive species also are presenting more and more major water pollution challenges throughout the country.

“Outdoor recreation has become one of the engines that drive Pennsylvania’s economy. Fishing and boating alone have economic impacts valued at more than \$2 billion per year for the Commonwealth,” Secretary McGinty said. “Allowing the destruction of our waterways and recreational resources will devastate some of the very natural prizes that have made Pennsylvania so famous.”

DEP recently confirmed that zebra mussel adults and juveniles have been found in Goodyear Lake, the first major impoundment on the Susquehanna River’s main stem below Canadarago Lake in New York. Zebra mussels are an invasive species posing a serious ecological and economic threat to the water resources and water users downstream in the river and Chesapeake Bay.

“The boating public is a key player in the spread of zebra mussels, which hitch a ride on boats and sporting equipment,” Secretary McGinty said. “Boats, trailers and other water recreation equipment can easily transport zebra mussels from infested waters. Many inland lakes of New York, including Canadarago Lake in the Susquehanna River Basin, have been infected in this manner.”

Zebra mussels are the only freshwater mussels that readily attach to and cluster on submerged objects. They are prolific breeders and, because they are not a native species, have no controlling natural predators, making control and cleanup methods difficult, very expensive and generally unsuccessful. The best control is to limit the spread of zebra mussels by cleaning boats and equipment before and after use.

Zebra mussels also threaten aquatic ecosystems by their ability to filter about a quart of water per day. While water clarity is improved during this process, they disrupt the food chain by removing microscopic aquatic organisms called plankton, which supports the existence of native mussels and fish.

In 2002, the first report of zebra mussel populations in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed were reported from Eaton Reservoir in the headwaters of the Chenango River, a major tributary to

the Susquehanna River in New York. A short time later, zebra mussels also were found in Canadarago Lake, a lake further east in the Susquehanna main stem headwaters. Now, through DEP's Zebra Mussel Monitoring Network, reports were received that both zebra mussel adults and juveniles, called veligers, have made their way down to the Susquehanna main stem.

Adult zebra mussels can be found in other Pennsylvania waters, including Lake Erie, the Ohio River, and lower portions of the Allegheny and Monogahela rivers. Other occurrences of zebra mussels have been reported from northwestern Pennsylvania lakes such as Edinboro and Sandy lakes as well as upper French Creek in Crawford County.

The zebra mussel is native to the Caspian Sea in Eastern Europe. They were introduced to this country around 1985 when ocean-going ships released infested ballast water into the lower Great Lakes.

For more information on zebra mussels, visit DEP's Web site at www.dep.state.pa.us,
Keyword: "DEP Water Quality."

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2004

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