



Zebra Mussel

Dreissena polymorpha

History

- * Believed to be introduced to the Great Lakes during ballast water exchange from a cargo ship from the Black Sea
- * Since being discovered in Great Lakes in 1988, the species has spread widely into freshwater habitats across North America
- * Native to Black, Caspian, and Azov Seas

Characteristics

- * Named for the striped pattern on its shell - Black or brownish shell with cream or white stripes
- * Shells colors vary widely; some pale or completely white
- * Maximum size less than 2 in (5 cm) long; often less than 1 in
- * Zebra shell is stable when placed on it's flattened hinge side while quagga mussels, lacking a flat side, fall over
- * Valves (shell halves) are symmetrical, forming a straight line when closed whereas the quagga mussel valves are asymmetrical, forming a curved line when the valves are closed

Habitat

- * Lakes, estuaries, streams
- * Attached to hard surfaces such as rocks, wood, and plants and to manmade structures of concrete, metal, and fiberglass
- * Tolerate salinity to 6 ppt, temperatures to approximately 29 degrees C

Known Distribution

- * 21 states and 2 provinces including Quebec, New York, Vermont, Massachusetts, and Connecticut

Impacts

- * Voracious filter feeders, removing microscopic plants and animals from the water, reducing food available to other aquatic animals
- * May cause declines in fish populations
- * Clog intakes for power plants, industrial facilities, and public drinking water supplies
- * Foul boat and ship hulls
- * Economic impacts in the billions of dollars



Zebra (left) and quagga mussels

Credit: USGS



Zebra mussels (*Dreissena polymorpha*)

Credit: Whitney Cranshaw, Colorado State University

