

# North Dakota outdoors: What are aquatic nuisance species?

By Doug Leier



You’ve heard for years about aquatic nuisance species (ANS) but what are they? The zebra mussel is likely the most famous, or infamous. Let’s get back to the basics and review some of the most important information on ANS and zebra mussels

## What are aquatic nuisance species?

Aquatic nuisance species are nonnative organisms that cause harm to native and desirable species, the environment, economy, or human health. They are wreaking havoc on aquatic ecosystems across the nation. Among these invaders, the zebra mussel stands out as a particularly troubling species, one that is increasingly making its presence felt in North Dakota’s lakes and rivers.

## What is a zebra mussel?

Zebra mussels are small, freshwater mollusks native to the Caspian Sea region. They were accidentally introduced to North America in the late 1980s through the ballast water of European ships. Initially found in the Great Lakes, zebra mussels have spread rapidly across the continent, and unfortunately, they’ve made their way into North Dakota.

The zebra mussel poses significant risks to the state’s aquatic systems, and their effects are far-reaching. These mussels are notorious for their ability to reproduce at an alarming rate. A single female can produce up to a million eggs per year. Once established in an area, zebra mussels attach to surfaces in dense colonies, which can cause



Ben Holen, NDGF Aquatic Nuisance Species Coordinator inspecting for hidden zebra mussels. They pose significant risks to the state’s aquatic systems, and their effects are far-reaching. Photo by Ashley Peterson NDGF

a range of problems. They clog water intake pipes, disrupt native species, and contribute to the decline of water quality by filtering out plankton and altering food webs.

In North Dakota, zebra mussels have been found in eastern North Dakota waters and the Red River, its tributaries, boat docks, marinas, and other infrastructure, where they accumulate in large numbers. In fact, the invasive species are now a growing concern for people who rely on these bodies of water for fishing, boating and water supply.

The expansion of zebra mussels can lead to a significant reduction in native aquatic biodiversity. By out-competing local mussels and filtering out plankton, the primary food source for many aquatic species. Zebra mussels disrupt the entire ecosystem. This can lead to a decline in fish populations, affecting local fisheries, anglers, and the economic health of communities that depend on these natural resources.

On top of the ecological damage, zebra mussels can also have a substantial financial toll. Their ability to cling to infrastructure means they can cause major issues for water utilities, irrigation systems and power plants. The cost of cleaning zebra mussels from intake pipes and other equipment can be considerable, especially in areas where infestations have gone unchecked for years. For fisheries and water recreation, to municipalities and power companies, the financial burden of managing

zebra mussels can be significant.

The spread of zebra mussels in North Dakota highlights the importance of preventative measures and public awareness. The Game and Fish Department has been working to monitor water bodies for invasive species and implement strategies to limit their spread. Programs that focus on educating boaters, anglers and others who use water resources about the importance of cleaning boats and gear after each use are essential in combating the spread of zebra mussels.

One of the most effective tools in the fight against zebra mussels is early detection. As more lakes and rivers in North Dakota are surveyed for the presence of invasive species, scientists can identify problem areas before they become widespread. Public reporting systems allow citizens to notify authorities when they spot potential zebra mussel colonies, which can help lead to more rapid responses and containment efforts.

Zebra mussels pose a serious threat to North Dakota’s aquatic environments. Their rapid spread and destructive effects on native ecosystems and local economies cannot be ignored. However, through education, prevention, and monitoring, we can take steps to slow their invasion and protect the beauty and biodiversity of North Dakota’s waters for future generations. It’s up to all of us to be vigilant stewards of our precious aquatic resources and help ensure that zebra mussels don’t continue to spread unchecked.

## ‘CURLING’ CON’T FROM PAGE 1

had things going on around the holidays, with the new renovations, they are able to offer summer ice for curling and have had an outstanding response.

Halcrow said they cap the number of teams at 28 four person teams and usually fill every spot. This year they will have live music from the local Homestead Band on Friday evening which will be followed by the band Quick 56 based out of Fargo. There will also be a brand new food truck called “Vernie’s Kitchen,” which serves American style food available Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. In addition to live music and a food truck, there will also be bouncy houses set up for the children.

“There will be air conditioning inside and we may have black jack available to play as well,” Halcrow said. “I hope everyone comes out to enjoy the air conditioned environment and watch some curling.”

Halcrow said they really appreciate the sponsorship they get as well as all the members of the curling club and the Curling Club gaming. He said without them none of the donations to various community efforts or renovations would be possible.

According to Halcrow, the curling club is open to the public. He said anyone 13-years-of age or older can be a member. Membership fees are \$125 per year and \$50 per year for new members. He



The flooring was replaced entirely during the renovation. Photo by Tom Halcrow



also said if there are students interested in curling and curl for two consecutive years, they get a \$1,000 scholarship for continuing education and there is no limit to the amount of scholarships they will give out. The Drayton Curling Club also has a Facebook page people can follow for updates and information.

Halcrow said during the winter months beginning shortly after Christmas and running into spring, there is an open curling league every Wednesday evening which is available for both men and women. The first games begin at 6 pm and the second at 8 pm. Three games can be played during each time slot.

According to the Drayton Curling Club website, “Curling is a lifelong recreational and athletic sport enjoyed by people of all ages. It is a game of skill and traditions, dictated by a strong code of fair play and courtesy. A curler delights in a shot well-executed even by the opponent and players to win in an environment of sportsmanship and good cheer. Today, Drayton Curling Club keeps that sense of tradition alive, while cultivating a thoroughly modern vibe that appeals to all ages...”

“Our club has an old time rustic feel with modern ice,” Halcrow said. “I hope people come out to watch this long time tradition. We appreciate all the support we have received.”

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