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Zebra mussels found in lake

Surveying underway to determine how far they have spread and if they can be stopped
by Kristine Goodrich

Editor

After three zebra mussels were found in White Bear Lake, a consulting aquatic scientist is urging locals to "act but don't overreact."

A local high school science teacher found three suspected zebra mussels on a rock while snorkeling near the lake's southeast shore the weekend of Sept. 20-21. Biologists from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources searched the area Sept. 25 and confirmed the presence of the invasive mussels.

Lake overseers are now launching a survey of the lake to determine how far the mussels have spread.

"The question is if they were

The hope is the mussels are still contained to a small area of the lake and can be eradicated by a chemical treatment.

found in the very early stage, or have they been there for awhile and we are just now finding them?" said Steve McComas, a lake quality expert who is assisting with the survey.

The hope is the mussels are still contained to a small area of the lake and can be eradicated by a chemical treatment. A DNR press release casts doubt on that prospect. The size and location of the

found mussels suggest that the lake has mussels that are already reproducing, the announcement states.

McComas and White Bear Lake Conservation District board member Mike Parenteau aren't jumping to any conclusions until after the survey is conducted. With volunteer divers and shoreline waders, they planned to start searching for more mussels on Sept. 30.

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Mussels

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A 2009 study conducted by McComas predicting how well the mussels would propagate if they ever made their way into White Bear Lake will help guide their search and response.

If there are too many mussels to eradicate, it won't have a dire effect on the lake, according to McComas. Since White Bear Lake doesn't have an excess of algae, the mussels would have a limited food supply and hence limited growth potential. The mussel population could grow enough to change fish patterns and become a recreational nuisance, but wouldn't significantly harm the lake's overall ecology. "It really doesn't hurt the lake," McComas said.

The efforts in that case would turn to minimizing the impacts and stopping the spread to other bodies of water. That will require the cooperation of boaters, who will need to take measures such as removing all vegetation, removing drain plugs and disposing of bait before taking their boats to any other lake.

"It's a setback, but we'll figure it out," McComas said. "There was a great deal of concern about mill-foil when it arrived in White Bear Lake, but we were able to figure out how to manage it. We can do the same with zebra mussels."

The DNR asks lake users who find any suspected mussels to call 888-646-6367.