

Protect Oklahoma From Aquatic Invasive Species

*Ask your Legislators to Cosponsor the National Aquatic Invasive Species Act!
(S. 770 and H.R. 1591/1592)*

What is an invasive species?

Invasive alien species affect all regions of the United States. These species have been accidentally or intentionally introduced into an environment from which they did not evolve. Because they have no natural enemies to limit their reproduction, they usually spread rampantly. Invasive alien species are recognized as one of the leading threats to biodiversity and impose enormous costs to agriculture, military installations, forestry, fisheries, and other human enterprises, as well as to human health.



- *The cost to control invasive species and the damages they inflict upon property and natural resources in the U.S. is estimated at **\$137 billion annually.***

Oklahoma's agriculture, industry, and recreation are impacted by numerous invasive species. These introductions also threaten the state's natural habitats and native species. Although many programs have been established to manage Oklahoma's invasive species, they focus mostly on terrestrial species, such as fire ants and noxious weeds.

The Sooner State has 200 man-made lakes, than any other state, over one million surface-acres of water, and 2,000 more miles of shoreline than the Atlantic and Gulf coasts combined. Oklahoma is linked to the world's waters by the McClellan-Kerr Navigation system – flowing from the Arkansas River through Arkansas to the Mississippi River to the Gulf of Mexico. With so many water bodies, Oklahoma is at great risk from aquatic invasive species introductions. Oklahoma has almost 775,000 anglers in the state and fishing produces almost \$1 billion in economic output, over \$484 million in fishing related retail sales, and over 11,000 jobs.

What aquatic invasive species are causing problems in Oklahoma?

Zebra mussels - Since their introduction to the United States in 1986, zebra mussels have quickly spread and are now found in at least twenty states. In Oklahoma, zebra mussels have been found inside the locks at both Robert S. Kerr and Webbers Falls along the McClellan-Kerr Navigation System, Lake Oologah and Lynn Lane Lake in Tulsa and found in the Arkansas and Verdigris rivers. Despite its small size, the zebra mussel has had devastating and wide-ranging effects. This fast-growing invertebrate not only out-competes native species for food and habitat but also has the potential to clog navigational locks and hydroelectric dams and could cause serious problems for agricultural irrigation systems. Recreational activities may also be impacted by zebra mussels through colonization of docks, boat hulls and nets. It is estimated that managing zebra mussels cost taxpayers an estimated \$30 million annually.





Asian carp- Invasive fish also threaten Oklahoma's aquatic ecosystems. Asian carp are known to crowd out native fish (some sections of the Mississippi River are now 97% Asian carp). Because they consume 40% of their body weight daily, they severely impact food chain dynamics. Round goby, introduced by ballast water, have been very damaging to small-mouth bass fisheries in the Great Lakes, particularly in Ohio and Lake Erie. There is nothing to stop round goby from reaching Oklahoma, and no reason to expect that they could not survive quite well in Oklahoma's lakes and reservoirs. If these species invade Oklahoma, it could be extremely damaging to Oklahoma's fishing industry.

Purple Loosestrife- Oklahoma is also plagued by aquatic plants, including this invasive wetland plant that forms dense stands of plants at the expense of native species. Unsuitable as food, cover, or nesting habitat for waterfowl, this species nationally costs \$45 million annually to manage.

How do invasive species get here and how do we stop new arrivals?

Invasive species are introduced and spread through a variety of pathways. Chief amongst these are introductions from the ballast water of ships. While Oklahoma does not have deep water ports, invasive species introduced to other areas could reach the state via the Intracoastal Waterway. Furthermore, even towed barges take up and discharge ballast water, and may also transfer hull-fouling species. Invasive species can also be introduced intentionally, be transferred by recreational boaters, or may spread naturally from previously infested areas.



How the National Aquatic Invasive Species Act of 2005 Can Help

To help battle these foreign invaders, members of Congress have introduced the National Aquatic Invasive Species Act (NAISA). NAISA was introduced by Rep. Gilchrest (H.R. 1591/1592) in the House and Senator Levin and Senator Collins (S. 770) in the Senate.

Activities in NAISA that benefit Oklahoma include:

Creating a nationwide mandatory ballast water management program to prevent new invasive species from reaching Oklahoma's ports and aquatic ecosystems via the Intracoastal Waterway, this includes:

- An interim treatment standard to help prevent introductions now and a final biological standard to be implemented at a future date
- Requirements for ships to have an Invasive Species Management Plan onboard outlining ways to minimize transfers on a "whole ship" basis
- Screening planned importations of live aquatic organisms to ensure that aquatic invasive species are not intentionally introduced into Oklahoma
- Rapid response funding and tools to assist Oklahoma in efforts to prevent and control the spread of invasive species
- Education and information programs directed at recreationalists to prevent the spread of invasive species through boating; vessel trailering and other associated activities
- Conducting ecological surveys for early detection of invasive species and analysis of invasion rates and patterns

Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation Supports NAISA

Provisions of the bill that will directly benefit the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation (ODWC):

- Federal funds will be made available to help develop strategies and implement measures for rapid response to contain recent invaders.
- One of the research priorities of the Mississippi River Basin Panel, of which Oklahoma is a member, is to determine the extent of Asian carp abundance and distribution in the lower Mississippi River Basin. This bill provides \$3 million annually to the Regional Panels to foster such work. Asian carp have become superabundant in the upper basin. Expert opinion is that once Asian carp invade Lake Texoma, natural reproduction is likely, and could pose an imminent threat to both the striped bass fishery and paddlefish recovery efforts.
- This bill increases outreach funding to the 100th Meridian Initiative to \$750,000 annually and provides funding for outreach efforts to inform industry of the potential for spread of invasive species in their activities.
- Funding will be available to assist states with aquatic invasive screening programs to determine if importation of live organisms poses an ecological threat and determine if known invasive species are "piggybacking" on shipments of non-invasive organisms.



Please ask your Senators and Representative to cosponsor the National Aquatic Invasive Species Act (S. 770 and H.R. 1591/1592) so we can preserve Oklahoma's natural heritage and important regional economies.



References:

Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation <http://www.wildlifedepartment.com/mussel.htm>

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service: Partners for Fish and Wildlife program <http://partners.fws.gov/pdfs/OK-needs.pdf>

The Biodiversity Partnership <http://www.biodiversitypartners.org/state/ok/invasive.shtml>

Northeast Midwest Institute - <http://www.nemw.org/biopollute.htm>

American Sportfishing Association - http://www.asafishing.org/asa/statistics/economic_impact/indexhtml

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