

It's a war OU gets its stripes up vs. zebra mussel

By Pat Murphy
staff writer

Oakland University is joining the war against the zebra mussel, the pesky intruder threatening to disrupt marine life in the Great Lakes.

OU biologists, including associate professor Doug Hunter, and a small group of students will spend 13 days tracking zebra mussel larvae in the waters of northern Lake Michigan. "Their efforts will add to the data base on the zebra mussel," said Joseph Leach, a research scientist with the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources. "Presently we have no information about the zebra mussel in Lake Michigan and their efforts will help."

Leach is one of many scientists studying the impact of the zebra mussel, a bivalve mollusk, introduced to the Great Lakes in 1986. Since its detection in southwestern Lake St. Clair, the zebra mussel has spread into relatively shallow Lakes Erie and Ontario with one confirmed finding near Duluth, Minn., in Lake Superior.

EXPERTS SAY it's only a matter of time before the mussel colonizes throughout the Great Lakes as well as inland lakes and the Mississippi River system.

Just how the zebra mussel will im-



Although it's relatively small, about the size of a thumbnail, the zebra mussel poses big problems for the Great Lakes as well as inland lakes and rivers. The mussel is able to fix itself to rocks, pipes or boat hulls, with females able to produce more than 30,000 eggs in a season.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimates the potential economic loss to the Great Lakes as a result of the zebra mussel could reach \$3.7 million.

pact the Great Lakes is not fully known. In Europe, where the mussel was introduced about 200 years ago, it has caused environmental problems in addition to clogging pipelines, fouling fishing gear and navigational aids and reducing the recreational and aesthetic value of beaches and shorelines.

Last year the mussel clogged the 30-inch intake pipe of Monroe, forcing that city to temporarily curtail water use. The mussel was primarily responsible for the city's not being able to draw water through the intake for two days in December.

The mussel competes with sport fish like walleye pike and smallmouth bass by devouring plankton and occupying prime spawning areas.

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Hunter and the OU contingent will spend much of their time sampling the waters off Green Bay, near the Washington Islands.

Operating out of Escanaba, Hunter's team will make daily trips to the islands where they will test for zebra mussel larvae.

Another part of the science team will simultaneously gather data on island biogeography. That contingent will be headed by James R. Wells of Birmingham, an adjunct professor of biological science at OU.

The teams were originally scheduled to operate from "The Pride of Michigan," a vessel that is part of the U.S. Navy Sea Cadet Corp.

But plans were changed and the science team will conduct its studies from a private vessel, without linkage to the sea cadet program.

The OU team will leave the mouth of the Clinton River in Anchor Bay

on July 3.

Over the next few days the ship is scheduled to work its way up the St. Clair River, into Lake Huron, past the Straits of Mackinaw to Escanaba, with the science team taking water samples as it goes.

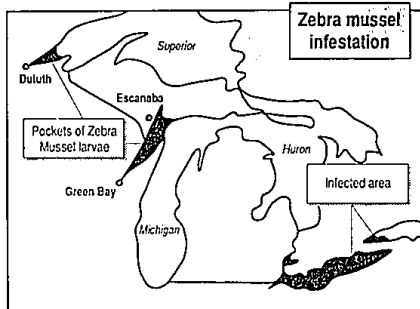
HUNTER SAID they selected the waters north of Green Bay for the principal focal point of their re-

search because of its proximity to shipping lanes.

Mussels travel by affixing to boats and depositing microscopic larvae along the route. Mature female mussels can produce more than 30,000 eggs in a single season.

Mussels — which grow to about the size of a thumbnail — can affix themselves to most smooth surfaces. They have been known to encrust underwater objects like navigational buoys and ship hulls — with 2 to 3 inches of mollusk.

So far, scientists do not have an efficient method of killing the zebra mussels or curtailing their spread. Natural predators, like ducks and some species of fish, so far haven't been numerous enough to curb the colonization.



Map reflects areas in which the zebra mussel, or its larvae, has been found. Lake Erie and the western end of Lake Ontario are already infested. Larvae has been spotted near Green Bay and Duluth.

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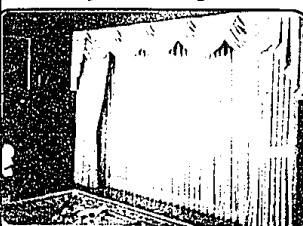
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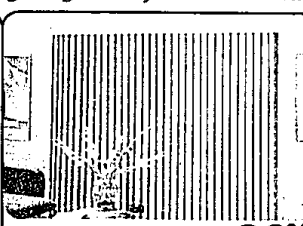
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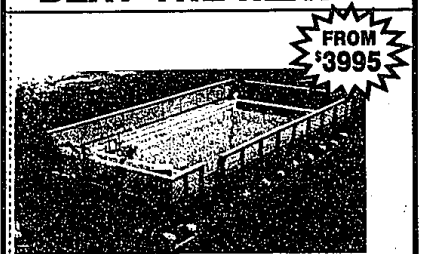
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