

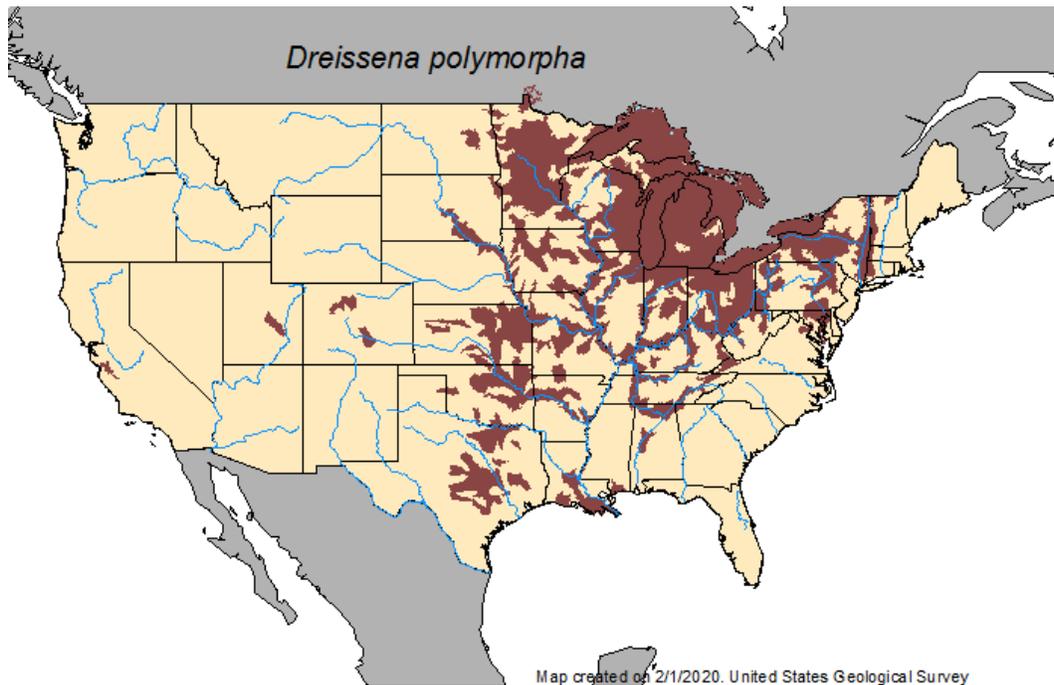
Zebra Mussels



Photo: A Benson - USGS

Georgia is home to several species of mussels, but thankfully zebra mussels currently are not one of them. A small mollusk having “zebra” stripes, it has spread throughout the country and has been described by the USGS as the “poster child of biological invasions”. In areas where it becomes established it can pose significant negative ecological and economic impacts through biofouling and outcompeting native species.

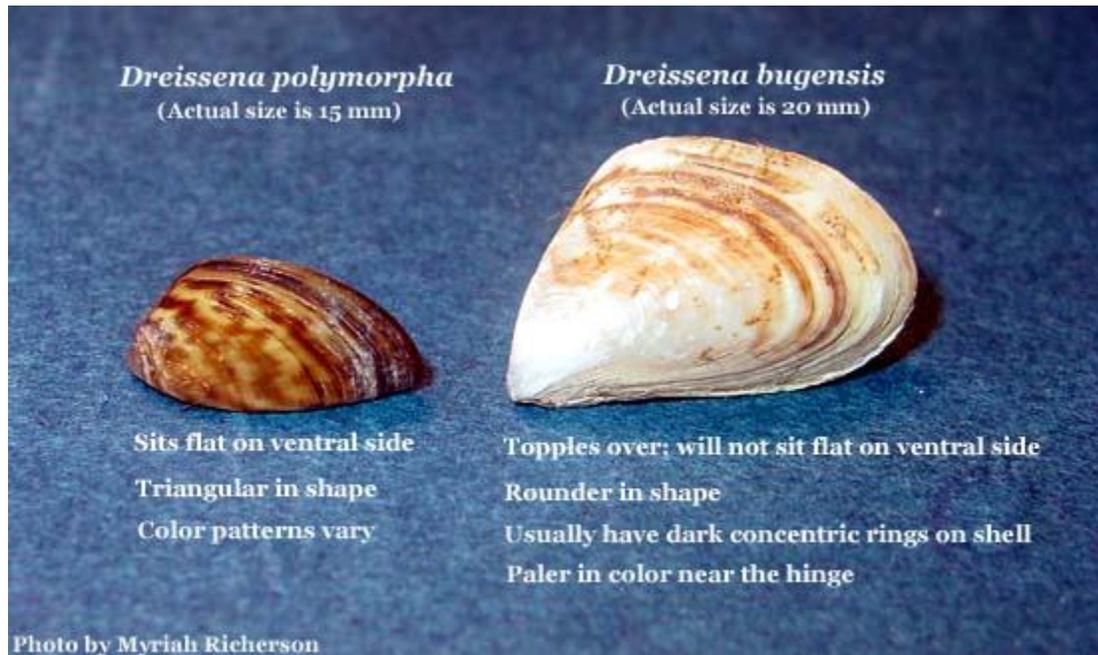
Discoveries of Zebra Mussels



Zebra Mussel Identification

Though zebra mussels (*Dreissena polymorpha*) have been found in several states since their introduction via ballast water into the Great Lakes, the species has thus far not been found in Georgia. Zebra mussels can be confused with other mussel species,

particularly the non-native quagga mussel (*Dreissena bugensis*). The guide below can help further distinguish the species. Should you have questions regarding identification of a mussel you have found, or if you suspect you have found a zebra mussel, **RETAIN THE SPECIMEN** and **IMMEDIATELY** [contact your regional Georgia DNR Wildlife Resources Division Fisheries Office](#).



Source: USGS <https://nas.er.usgs.gov/queries/factsheet.aspx?speciesid=5>

So, What Harm do Zebra Mussels Cause?

A notorious mussel introduced into the Great Lakes via ballast water a few decades ago, zebra mussels have since spread to several states throughout the U.S. Though small in size, the mussel has been known to cause enormous-sized problems, most notably its biofouling capabilities that often result in clogged water lines for power plants, industrial facilities, and other commercial entities. Such biofouling has resulted in significant economic costs to several communities. In addition to its ability to create biofouling issues, the species is known to have profound effects on various ecosystems. A plankton consumer, zebra mussels can have significant negative impacts on plankton abundance in an area. USGS reports zooplankton abundance dropped 55-71% in Lake Erie following a mussel invasion. Such reductions certainly impact a plethora of native species which rely on these same plankton for food.

Current Management for Zebra Mussels

Though zebra mussels are currently not in Georgia, GA DNR staff continue to proactively engage in efforts to educate members of the public about this and other non-native species introductions, particularly in an effort to avoid man-induced introductions. Man-induced introductions can be deliberate (i.e. intentionally moving a fish from one area to another with hopes to establish a population) or by accident (i.e. use of species as bait, which may escape and become established). In either scenario, understanding the potential impacts of our decisions is key to minimizing such occurrences.