



March 26, 2002

Dear sent to numerous agencies and organizations listed at the end of the letter:

The Montana Chapter of the American Fisheries Society is writing to ask for your support and participation in efforts to control exotic aquatic nuisance species in Montana. Some species have already become established in Montana (e.g. salt cedar or *Tamarisk* and the New Zealand mud snail) while other  
s are likely to invade the state in the near future (e.g. zebra mussels and Eurasian Milfoil).

Of the currently invading species, the Montana Chapter AFS is particularly concerned about the New Zealand mud snail (NZMS). This prolific snail was first found in the Madison River in 1994 and has reached densities of 300,000  
/sq/ meter within Yellowstone National Park. It has since been detected in all major drainages in the Park and downstream in the Madison River below Quake Lake. A disjunct population has been documented in Darlinton Ditch outside of Three Forks, near the mouth of the Madison River.  
Because of it's high densities, the snail has the potential to outcompete native benthic macroinvertebrates for food and space. In 1998, in the Madison River near West Yellowstone on Highway 191, the mudsnails comprised 70% of all aquatic invertebrates. The snails, unfortunately, are a poor source of food for fish, whose digestive fluids cannot digest the snail shells to get at the nutritious soft tissue inside. Studies in New Zealand showed that brown trout extract less than 2% of the energy available from ingested NZMS. While rainbow trout can extract almost 20%, other mollusks with unbroken shells yielded 38-67% of the energy available. The reproductive biology of the NZMS is quite interesting, but problematic. They reproduce by cloning, therefore a single NZMS can start a new population. In fact, very few male NZMS have been found in North America, and all populations in the western US are entirely female and of a single genotype. NZMS are characterized as "born pregnant" because developing embryos can be detected in larvae as they are released from the parent.

The Montana Chapter is concerned that our public natural resource agencies have not made enough effort to understand the threat that is posed by this snail. With this letter, we are urging all agencies to initiate efforts to document the distribution and abundance of this snail, and then take actions to slow or reduce its numbers where needed.

Specifically, we would like your agency to immediately require all field personnel to perform visual inspections for the presence of NZMS as a part of every field activity. In addition we are requesting that you instruct all personnel to collect samples of suspect snails and transmit them to the proper investigators for identification.

People already working on the mudsnail issue in Montana include Dr. Billie Kerans(406-994-3725) and Dr. Dan Gustufson (406-994-2771) at Montana State University in Bozeman and Pat Clancey with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks in Ennis (406-682-7807). They can be contacted to obtain information about the habits, identification, and chemical control of this species. Dr. Gustufson, in particular, has agreed to field calls or inquiries related to mud snail identification. The Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks has started an Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force, and we see this as an appropriate forum which can be used to organize and coordinate a mudsnail inventory. We encourage your agency or company to join this task force if you have not done so already. Tim Gallagher with MFWP is the contact with the Task Force and can be reached at 406-444-2448. With a coordinated effort, we feel that we can minimize the damage that may come from the presence of the mudsnail in Montana.

Sincerely,

Pat Clancey  
President, Montana Chapter

cc: Jan Sensibaugh, MDEQ  
Bud Clinch, MDNRC  
Chris Hunter, MFWP  
Ralph Peck, MDOA  
Joel Marshik, MDOT  
Kate Walker, USFS  
Mark Wilson, USFWS  
Mick Shea, Ron Snyder, USCOE  
Susan Kelly, BOR  
Matt Millenbach, BLM  
Leo Marnell, Glacier Ntl. Park  
John Varley, Yellowstone Ntl. Park  
Mark Reller, BPA  
Sean Cross, CSKT  
Brent Mabbott, PPL Montana  
Joe Dos Santos, AVISTA

[Back to Chapter Correspondence Page](#)

[Back to MCAFS Home Page](#)

**Hit Counter** viewers since 4-8-02