

# The Zebra Mussel Threat In Maryland: Promoting Action Through Awareness

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The Zebra Mussel (*Dreissena polymorpha*) was introduced from Europe into Lake Erie in 1986 via ballast water discharge. Since the first sighting in Lake St. Clair, in 1988, the zebra mussel has spread throughout the Great Lakes and is now distributed through most of the Hudson and Mississippi Rivers. Zebra mussels are expected to be introduced into the Chesapeake Basin from the Susquehanna River or via the Ohio River with transfer to riverine and lacustrine systems of West Virginia, Virginia and western Maryland.

The extensive fouling and economic impact of zebra mussels is unprecedented in North American systems. Control and clean-up estimates for the Great Lakes Region alone are estimated in the billions of dollars over the next decade. Concern over zebra mussel infestation of fresh water systems in Maryland, particularly the Baltimore City municipal reservoirs, prompted the Baltimore City Department of Public Works to close the Loch Raven, Liberty and Prettyboy reservoirs to boating during the 1992 season. As a result, businesses supporting the popular recreational fisheries of these reservoirs including, boat and tackle shops, guides and other services, were impacted. The resulting economic loss, based on the threat of zebra mussel introduction alone appears to be unprecedented in the history of exotic species introductions.

To prepare the Mid-Atlantic Region for zebra mussels, the National Sea Grant College Program (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) provided grants to the Sea Grant Colleges of Delaware, Maryland, North Carolina, New Jersey, and Virginia to develop zebra mussel awareness programs. This program has encouraged cooperative efforts between the University of Maryland Sea Grant College and the other Mid-Atlantic states as well as key state agencies including the Maryland Department of Natural Resources. This outreach effort has provided information on zebra mussels to about 250,000 individuals in Maryland alone through publications, slide presentations and the Mid-Atlantic Zebra Mussel Conference held in Baltimore March, 1993. Many more citizens have been reached through news columns and the increased media coverage Sea Grant programs have stimulated.