

Spiny Water Flea

Bythotrephes longimanus

Iowa Aquatic Invasive Species Fact Sheet

Description: The spiny waterflea is not an insect but a small crustacean. It is about a 1/2 inch long with a long, sharp, barbed tail spine.

Distribution: It is native to Great Britain, and its home range extended through Northern Europe east to the Caspian Sea. It was first found in Lake Huron in 1984, and was most likely introduced from ballast water discharge from a transoceanic freighter. Since then, populations of the crustacean have exploded and it can now be found throughout the Great Lakes and in many inland lakes and waterways.



Threats: The impact of the spiny waterflea on the Great Lakes ecosystem is still largely unknown. Resource managers have expressed concern that the animal may compete directly with young perch and other small fish for food, such as the Daphnia zooplankton. Since their sharp spine makes it extremely difficult for smaller fish to eat, leaving only a few larger species of fish to feed on them, their population remains high. Consequently, the populations of native plankton, which they feed on, have declined. This results in long term fisheries population declines.

Control: Be vigilant about cleaning all of your equipment. Clean all downrigger cables and monofilament lines on reels (plucking like a guitar string helps) to prevent carrying spiny waterfleas to another lake or river. Learn to recognize waterfleas on fishing gear, they will be a gelatinous or cotton-ball like material on lines near connections with lures, swivels, or downrigger balls. Drain lake or river water from livewell and bilge before leaving the access. Dispose of unwanted live bait in the trash.

Law: Iowa law makes it illegal to 1) possess, introduce, purchase, sell, propagate, or transport aquatic invasive species in Iowa, 2) place a trailer or launch a watercraft with aquatic invasive species attached in public waters, and 3) operate a watercraft in a marked aquatic invasive species infestation. The scheduled fine is \$500 for violating any of the above regulations. The law also requires the DNR to identify waterbodies infested with aquatic invasive species and post signs alerting boaters. The DNR may restrict boating, fishing, swimming, and trapping in infested waters.

