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Zebra Mussel Study Planned for Saginaw Bay

NOAA scientists will expand their existing environmental study of Saginaw Bay this spring to include a multi-year investigation of the impact of zebra mussels on the lower food web there.

The focus upon the recently introduced Great Lakes invader is being funded by a \$1 million addition to the budget of the Great Lakes Environmental Research Laboratory in Ann Arbor, Mich., appropriated specifically for zebra mussel research.

Introduced into the Great Lakes from Europe several years ago, the zebra mussel is seen as a threat to the existing food web. It competes with long-established aquatic organisms for such food resources as phytoplankton and small organic particles that are the base of the food chain, which fish and smaller aquatic animals rely on.

Fragile Ecosystem Balance

Researchers, who already know much about the environmental and ecological impacts of the bivalve, are studying how the mussel affects the functioning and fragile balance of the existing ecosystem. By understanding this, scientists can then help identify and assess potential planning and response options for various resource management agencies at the state and federal levels.

Saginaw Bay was selected for the research project because conditions there let researchers collect scientific data before initial infestation

by the zebra mussel, as well as during infestation and after the growth of the mussel population. This offers scientists an excellent opportunity to assess and understand the ecological impacts as they occur.

On-going Study

The NOAA laboratory has

'It Came From Wisconsin'

Monster Eels Feast on Midwest Fish!

You'd think that with war in the Persian Gulf and a whole host of other problems, you'd have enough to worry about. Well, think again.

Giant sea lampreys are wreaking havoc in the Great Lakes.

While it sounds like the plot for a 1950s drive-in movie, NOAA-funded Sea Grant zoologists in Wisconsin have found that the current generation of the eel-like parasite is much bigger than their counterparts were 25 years ago, and that spells trouble for the salmon and trout stocking programs in the Great Lakes.

As the stocking programs increase the numbers of salmon and trout, the lamprey population grows larger and larger in average size and eats up the extra fish. "Basically," said one researcher, "we've created more food for each lamprey."

The largest lampreys kill ten times as many fish than lam-

been conducting a small, on-going ecological study in the Bay under its general ecosystems research program. The project will be led by biologist Thomas Narlepa, who predicted it likely will take at least another year for the mussels to produce enough of a population in Saginaw Bay to start having a measurable affect on the ecosystem. Small numbers of zebra mussels were found on navigation buoys and commercial fishing nets this fall. ☺

preys half their size. While the number of lampreys in the Lakes is stable, their overall effect has increased six-fold. Zoologists are now refining their computer models to better estimate the losses these enormous eels are inflicting on the fishery, and searching for an answer.

Maybe kryptonite... ☺

Coming Events

- "State of the Coast," briefing on recent Office of Marine Assessment report, in Washington, D.C., Jan. 29.
- NWS Eastern Region Symposium, a celebration of American weather services, in Port Jefferson, N.Y., Jan. 29.

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

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