

# Invasive Algae Threatening Northern NH & Western Maine Waters

VERMONT AGENCY OF NATURAL RESOURCES

## PRESS RELEASE

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ANR Confirms First Northeastern U.S. Infestation of 'Didymo'

Aquatic nuisance discovered in northern Connecticut River

Waterbury, Vt. – The Vermont Agency of Natural Resources today confirmed that the aquatic nuisance algae known commonly as “didymo” or “rock snot” has invaded the northern reaches of the Connecticut River, marking the first official report of *Didymosphenia geminata* in the Northeastern United States. Believed to be native to far northern regions of Europe and Asia, didymo has been expanding its range and tolerance for warmer, more nutrient-rich water conditions during recent years in Europe and North America. Accompanying this expansion have been increasing reports of massive blooms that reach nuisance levels, forming thick mats of cottony material on the bottoms of rivers and streams that can potentially smother aquatic plants and destroy fish habitat. “Dense mats of didymo can harm populations of aquatic insects which form an important source of food for fishes, including trout,” said Steve Fiske, a biologist with the agency’s Department of Environmental Conservation. “Also of concern are the potential effects of dense accumulations of these algae on the shells of the dwarf wedge mussel, a state and federally listed endangered species found in New England only in the Ashuelot and Connecticut rivers.” The suspected didymo population was reported June 25 to fish and wildlife officials by an alert fishing guide who spotted the algae growing on rocks in the Connecticut River near Bloomfield, Vt. Dr. Sarah Spaulding of the U.S. Geological Survey – a leading expert on the species who is based in Denver – confirmed today that what the fishing guide found was indeed didymo. **There are currently no known methods for controlling or eradicating didymo once it infests a water body.** “Spread prevention is our best, and really our only, defense against the harmful effects of this species,” said Angela Shambaugh, an algae expert at the agency’s Department of Environmental Conservation. Anglers, kayakers and canoeists, boaters and jet skiers can all unknowingly spread didymo. The microscopic algae cling to fishing gear, waders, boots and boats, and remain viable for several weeks under even slightly moist conditions. Decontamination requires soaking clothing and equipment in hot water containing detergent, or a 2% bleach solution. Thoroughly drying clothing and equipment for a minimum of 48 hours can also be effective, but only if absolutely complete dryness is maintained. She also cautioned that even if didymo isn’t visible, it could still cling to clothes and equipment. “To be safe, everyone should begin using this procedure everywhere – particularly downstream of known didymo sites – as part of general spread prevention,” Shambaugh said. In the past several years, didymo has expanded its range in the Western United States and has infested rivers and streams in several southeastern states, including Virginia, West Virginia, Tennessee and North Carolina. This is the first report of didymo in the northeastern United States. In 2004, didymo was discovered in New Zealand. Within 18 months it had spread to 12 rivers on the South Island, forming nuisance blooms at several locations. New Zealand Biosecurity has instituted severe penalties for intentional spread of the algae, and is intensively researching control and prevention methods. The agency is urging anglers and other water recreationists to institute New Zealand’s recommended procedures for preventing the introduction and spread of didymo: Check, Clean and Dry.



- **Check:** Before leaving a river or stream, remove all obvious clumps of algae and look for hidden clumps. Leave them at the affected site. If you find any later, do not wash them down drains; dispose all material in the trash.
- **Clean:** Soak and scrub all items for at least one minute in either hot (140 degrees F) water, a two percent solution of household bleach or a five percent solution of salt, antiseptic hand cleaner or dishwashing detergent.
- **Dry:** If cleaning is not practical, after the item is completely dry to touch, wait an additional 48 hours before contact or use in any other waterway.