

Preventing further spread of New Zealand mudsnails

by Jo Wilhelm, Sally Abella

Highly invasive New Zealand mudsnails (*Potamopyrgus antipodarum*) are tiny, non-native animals that have been living in King County streams since at least 2009. Infested waters include Thornton Creek and the adjacent Lake Washington shoreline (Seattle), Kelsey and Valley creeks (Bellevue), and McAleer Creek (Lake Forest Park).

The snails are hardy, adaptable animals that reproduce quickly and can easily be transported to new areas by people, animals and equipment. Studies suggest that New Zealand mudsnails can alter stream chemistry, drive out native animals, and disrupt the natural food web, causing further harm to threatened and endangered salmon runs. Once they show up, it is impossible to get rid of them. Therefore, containing their spread is a high priority.

The Water and Land Resources Division's Science and Technical Support Section is working with partners to: (1) educate environmental professionals about decontamination procedures, (2) develop resources for mudsnail identification, (3)



The snail on the left is the New Zealand mudsnail. The other five are native snails, and some juvenile stages of native snails are similar in size to New Zealand mudsnails, so size may not be a good characteristic for identification.

Photo: Jennifer Vanderhoof.

analyze water quality data to assess the suitability of our streams for mudsnails, and (4) conduct targeted surveys when and where possible.

How can you help?

- Inspect, scrub, rinse, and drain all gear between field sites. In areas of known infestation, add one of the following decontamination methods: freeze for 8 hours, soak in hot water (140°F for 5 min), dry completely for more than 48 hours, or apply an appropriate chemical solution.

- Keep an eye out for snails whenever you enter the water! Learn how to identify mudsnails and distinguish them from native snails (see the King

County link below for a field identification card) and report possible sightings to Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife online at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/ais/reporting/>. In King County please contact Sally Abella or Jo Wilhelm (sally.abella@kingcounty.gov, jo.wilhelm@kingcounty.gov).

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