

Stop the Aquatic Hitchhikers!

What are aquatic hitchhikers?

“Aquatic hitchhikers” are non-native plants and animals that can be transported on boats and other recreational equipment. They are called “hitchhikers” because they attach themselves to boats, trailers and other equipment then catch a free ride from one body of water to another. As with regular hitchhikers, picking up aquatic hitchhikers is not a good idea because they can be dangerous.

Aquatic hitchhikers are dangerous because they upset the balance in our lakes and compete against native organisms. Once they are introduced into a lake, aquatic hitchhikers can drastically reduce fish populations, degrade water quality and obstruct pipelines and pumps that are used to supply treatment plants with water.

Two of the most troublesome hitchhikers are a plant called Eurasian Watermilfoil and tiny mussels called Zebra Mussels. Both of these can survive long trips out of water, and are usually transported on boats, trailers and motors. These invasive species can spread quickly and are difficult to get rid of once they enter a body of water.

Recently, these hitchhikers have been spotted in several lakes in Colorado and neighboring states.

How can aquatic hitchhikers be stopped?

The best way to stop aquatic hitchhikers is to wash all boats, trailers and equipment that contacts the water thoroughly, and allow it to dry for at least 10 days before placing it in another body of water. Using high pressure car washes with hot water and soap is recommended for boats and trailers.

Be aware of locations where the presence of aquatic hitchhikers has been confirmed. If you use your boat or other equipment on several lakes, find out if non-native species have been discovered there, and make sure that all plants and animals have been removed from your equipment before placing it on another lake.

If you fish or boat on Arvada Reservoir, please ask the rangers at the entrance for more information on stopping aquatic hitchhikers.