

Valley Angler Rock Snot by Bill Thompson

When it comes to the environment rarely is there ever any good news. It would seem that “Mother Earth” is being attacked on all fronts and giving up ground daily. This past week New Hampshire fishermen and lovers of clean water were handed one more piece of bad news. The New Hampshire Fish and Game Department announced that “didymo” or “rock snot” has been discovered in the upper reaches of the Connecticut River. This is the first report of *Didymosphenia geminata* in the Northeastern United States.

Thanks to the keen observations of Vermont fishing guide Lawton Weber, who contacted the proper authorities at Vermont Fish & Game biologists were able to quickly identify the invasive species.

Rock snot, as it is commonly known, can be devastating to a trout stream or any stream for that matter. True to its namesake it resembles snot and it covers rocks and stream bottoms resulting in the loss of aquatic insect life and plant life. Needless to say without a food supply trout and other fish soon disappear.

Didymo is believed to be native of northern Europe and Asia and has managed to spread around the world. In the past few years New Zealand has been especially plagued. It is thought that it was brought to New Zealand by American anglers who have come from the western states. Ironically just the other day I spoke to a fisherman from Kentucky who asked if I had heard of the stuff. The day before Janet had posted a notice concerning the stuff and its appearance in the Connecticut. Kentucky, Tennessee and Virginia are already experiencing rapid growth in their mountain streams. As luck would have it didymo prefers pristine cold-water streams.

Once “rock snot” has got a foot hold there is not a whole lot that can be done about it. The only hope is to contain the stuff and try to keep it in one location. The problem is that it is so easily spread by anglers and boaters. Yes if you are a paddler you are as much a part of the problem as fishermen. Didymo clings to almost anything that comes in contact with it. Wading boots and waders are especially prone to contamination. Flies and lures that come in contact are just as apt to spread it as wading gear.

If there is any hope at all it will take extreme vigilance on the part of anglers and boaters. Anyone who boats or fishes in waters contaminated with didymo should thoroughly clean their gear after being exposed.

The following measures must be employed: 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 latter do not flush 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 an item is completely dry to the touch, wait an additional 48 hours before contact or use in any waterway.

It is extremely urgent that this message is passed on to any who loves our New Hampshire streams and rivers. For more information please check out the following sites on the internet: <http://www.epa.gov/region8/didymosphenia> or <http://www.biosecurity.govt.nz/didymo> .

By the time this article appears there will be a cleaning station set up at the North Country Angler in North Conway. Anyone returning from the Connecticut River please stop by and clean your gear. It would be a great tragedy to have this menace spread to the Saco or any of the sounding rivers.

See you on the river.