

Fishhook Waterflea

Cercopagis pengoi

Iowa Aquatic Invasive Species Fact Sheet

Description: The Fishhook Waterflea is a small, predacious crustacean. They are difficult to see with their small size, but clumps of them look and feel like gelatin or cotton batting with tiny black spots. They have a distinctive loop at the end of their tail, hence the “fishhook” name.

Distribution: Fishhook waterfleas were first discovered in Lake Ontario in 1998, and then spread to parts of lakes Michigan, Erie and the Finger Lakes of New York.

Threats: Fishhook waterfleas collect in masses on fishing lines and downrigger cables. The masses can clog the first eyelet of rods, damage a reel’s drag system, and prevent fish from being landed. They can spread to inland waters when fishing gear is contaminated with egg-laden females. While females die out of water, under certain conditions they produce eggs that resist drying, remain viable, and can establish a new population.

Control: Be vigilant about cleaning all of your equipment. Clean all downrigger cables and monofilament lines on reels (plucking like a guitar string helps) to prevent carrying spiny waterfleas to another lake or river. Learn to recognize waterfleas on fishing gear, they will be a gelatinous or cotton-ball like material on lines near connections with lures, swivels, or downrigger balls. Drain lake or river water from livewell and bilge before leaving the access. Dispose of unwanted live bait in the trash. Eradicating established infestations of these waterfleas is impossible. The public’s help in detecting and reporting new infestations is vital for preventing their spread.

Law: Iowa law makes it illegal to 1) possess, introduce, purchase, sell, propagate, or transport aquatic invasive species in Iowa, 2) place a trailer or launch a watercraft with aquatic invasive species attached in public waters, and 3) operate a watercraft in a marked aquatic invasive species infestation. The scheduled fine is \$500 for violating any of the above regulations. The law also requires the DNR to identify waterbodies infested with aquatic invasive species and post signs alerting boaters. The DNR may restrict boating, fishing, swimming, and trapping in infested waters.

