



BY HEATHER STRASSELL

THE WATCHDOG

California anglers face the quickening spread of river-borne invasive species

With the arrival of Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) in California, local fly fishermen are presented with more challenges than just landing the “big one.” University of California’s biological control specialist Mark Hoddle maintains that invasive species “are without doubt one of the most important human-mediated factors that are degrading our wilderness areas.”

This fact is bad news for fly fishermen, whose felt-soled wading boots are blamed for the transportation of many AIS such as the algae didymo, the whirling disease parasite, and the New Zealand mud snail. Studies showing that densely woven felt fibers trap 100% of whirling disease spores (rubber soles trap 0%) and 3,000 times more didymo cells than rubber soles have contributed to the felt-sole bans in Vermont, Maryland, and Alaska.

However, not everyone feels the eradication of felt is necessary.

“The rubber-soled wading shoes do a great job in not soaking up a lot of material from the bottom of the river (and are) a great choice in keeping the spread of invasive species down,” Tim Daughton of Orvis says. “(Although) if you fish one watershed time after time, or if you go for maybe weeks or months between fishing trips, felt is

going to be fine.”

The reality of rubber: Many manufacturers have introduced rubber-soled op-

traction. To compensate, manufacturers are offering more innovative tread patterns and aftermarket wader studs to increase traction and safety.



Aquatic “hitchhikers” are an increasingly alarming issue throughout the West, including several river and lake systems in northern and central California. (PHOTO COURTESY GRIP STUDS)

Further challenges face fishermen as they also adopt new fishing practices to prevent AIS spread.

“(A) willingness by more people to take steps to reduce the accidental spread of invasive species from infested areas into clean areas need greater attention and promotion,” urges Hoddle.

Prevention is key: Although a rubber surface reduces the chance of hitchhikers attaching to boot soles, other parts of the boot – including lining and laces – may still transport AIS.

“As a general rule, invasive species may be present and undiscovered in the environment, so anglers are encouraged to make it standard practice to decontaminate their equipment between moving from one body of water to another,” advises Troy Swauger of the California Department of Fish & Game.

Fishermen everywhere are compelled to practice the

three “responsible angling” tips:

- Inspect all gear for AIS
- Thoroughly clean all gear
- Completely dry all equipment before relocating to another fishing site.

tions, but even with the new Vibram “grippy” rubber, these boots present another problem for fly fishermen: safety. Though less likely to harbor AIS, rubber soles offer drastically reduced wading

The good news is that with the appropriate gear and education, fishermen can both safely enjoy fly fishing and prevent the spread of AIS to uncontaminated California waters, preserving sport fishing for generations to come.

Tracking California's AIS's: Below is a list of AIS hitchhikers and their current locations in Northern and Central California:

•**New Zealand Mud Snail:** Lake Shasta, Big Lagoon, Freshwater Lagoon, Redwood Creek Estuary, American River, Sacramento River (at the American River junction), Russian River, Calaveras River, Rush Creek, Owens River, and the Bishops Creek Canal.

•**Didymo:** South Fork of the American, Feather and Bear rivers.

•**Whirling Disease:** The junction of Truckee River and Cabin Creek; the watershed



Thorough cleansing and drying of wading boots – including the laces and interior – is critical in preventing the further spread of AIS. (PHOTO COURTESY GRIP STUDS)

due east of Redding in Shasta County; and the watershed surrounding Lake Almanor, Butt Valley Reservoir, and the North Feather River.

•**Brazilian Waterweed and Eurasian Watermilfoil:** Sacramento County.

•**Hydrilla:** Shasta Country.

AIS info/resources: The DFG's preferred decontamination methods can be found at www.protectyourwaters.net.

Editor's Note: Additional resources and information on AIS can be found at www.calsportsmanmag.com

About the Author: Heather Strassell is webmaster and publishing-department manager for Grip Studs (www.gripstuds.com) for Wader Boots, and oversees product testing and packaging. She's an avid outdoorswoman and photographer.

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