



NOTICE TO THE WILDLIFE IMPORT/EXPORT COMMUNITY



March 8, 2022

Subject: Invasive Zebra Mussels Found in Aquarium Moss Balls

Background:

Invasive zebra mussels (*Dreissena polymorpha*) have been found in “moss balls” (an aquarium product containing green filamentous algae), imported into the United States and commonly sold at multiple pet supply stores and chains across North America.

Zebra mussels are listed as an injurious species under 50 CFR Part 16.13 and are prohibited from being imported into the United States without an Injurious Species Permit issued by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service). If zebra mussels become established in watersheds, they can cause significant damage to aquatic habitats including disrupting the food chain, changing water chemistry, and clogging water intake and delivery systems for boats, drinking water, irrigation and hydro power.

Zebra mussels are small mollusks with a “D” shaped triangular shell that can grow to approximately 5 cm in length. They are white to cream-colored, with jagged black to brown stripes. Larval zebra mussels are microscopic and may be present in the water in which moss balls are transported. Juvenile and adult zebra mussels may attach to the filaments of the moss balls and live on or in these products with little to no evidence of contamination. Zebra mussels can also survive outside of water for weeks.

Action:

The Service does not prohibit or otherwise regulate the import of moss balls, however, any moss ball import that is found to be contaminated with zebra mussels or other injurious wildlife may be subject to enforcement actions, including but not limited to, seizure.

Other federal agencies, including the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), do regulate the import of moss balls. USDA restricts the ports where moss balls may be imported, and requires a phytosanitary certificate and plant inspection. More information can be found on their website:

<https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/planthealth/import-information/permits/plants-and-plant-products-permits/plants-for-planting/plants-for-planting>.

Anyone who discovers zebra mussels in their moss balls should contact their state wildlife authorities to ensure compliance with any local injurious wildlife regulations. **Under no circumstances should these moss balls or the water they have been in contact with be disposed of in local waterways or storm drains.** Doing so will result in violations of injurious wildlife regulations and could result in investigation and enforcement action. Instructions regarding proper destruction and disposal of moss balls are found here: <https://www.fws.gov/fisheries/ANS/zebra-mussel-disposal.html>.

Contact:

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Office of Law Enforcement
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