

Dedicated to the Memory of Commissioner Enoch S. "Inky" Moore Jr.

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Sci-Fi in the Real World

by Kim Mumper

Watch out for alien species invading Pennsylvania! Sounds scary—like a bad sci-fi movie! This story is science fact, not fiction.

One of the biggest threats to Pennsylvania's waters is aquatic invasive species (AIS). That's the technical term for critters and plants that aren't native to our waters or shores. Pennsylvania isn't alone in this problem. AIS plague waters around the world.

Many terms are used for AIS: Non-native, alien, non-indigenous, invasive, and introduced. All of these terms suggest that these critters—and plants—aren't from around this area.

Nuisance species means that they are harmful to their new environments. Some mussels, for example, have multiplied

In zebra mussel-infested waters, it is not unusual for native mussels to be completely covered by zebra mussels.



profusely and are extremely good at filtering their water habitat. This takes food such as plankton out of the food web for native mussels and small fish. Some of the fish out-compete other fish for food—they are better predators. Others disrupt the habitat itself. Regardless of how they do it, AIS cause problems for native Pennsylvania species.

Terms to Know

Aquatic Nuisance Species: Aquatic animals and plants introduced into new ecosystems. They harm the natural resources in these ecosystems and their human uses.

Introduced species: A species living outside of its natural geographic range. Can be deliberately or accidentally introduced into the new ecosystem. Also called exotic, alien, non-native, non-indigenous.

Invasive: Spreading or taking over. Invasive species often take over or dominate a habitat.

Native: An animal or plant originating in a region or geographic range. Brook trout are native to Pennsylvania. Also called indigenous species.