



## New Zealand Mud Snail (*Potamopyrgus antipodarum*)

### What Is a New Zealand Mud Snail?

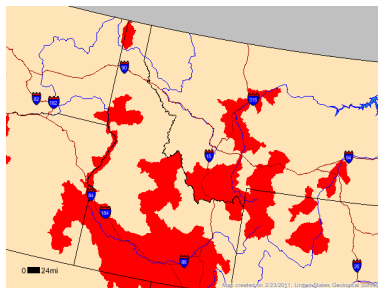
The New Zealand mud snail is a very small species of freshwater snail native to New Zealand. It is an invasive species in many countries, including the United States, where populations of this snail can reach phenomenal densities. The snails were discovered in the Snake River, Idaho in 1987 and have since spread rapidly throughout the western United States to become established in rivers in 10 western states and three national parks, including Grand Canyon and Yellowstone (<http://nas.er.usgs.gov/queries/factsheet.aspx?SpeciesID=1008>).



Mudsnail shells  
<http://nas.er.usgs.gov/queries/factsheet.aspx?SpeciesID=1008>

### Why Is Staff Concerned About This Snail?

While New Zealand mud snails have not yet been documented at Big Hole National Battlefield, they have been recorded in the county by the US Geological Survey (USGS). The snails have also been found in the following nearby counties: Beaverhead county, MT; Lemhi county, ID; Madison county, MT; and Gallatin county, MT.



Distribution of mudsnails across Idaho and western Montana

Park managers are concerned that this invasive species could inadvertently be introduced to the North Fork of the Big Hole River, altering the natural ecosystem. Mud snail populations often reach densities greater than 28,000 individuals per square foot of suitable habitat, completely covering a streambed. They can comprise up to 95 percent of the invertebrate biomass of a river. The snails form colonies that disrupt the base of the food chain by consuming algae. This prolific snail crowds out native aquatic insects that provide food for many aquatic and terrestrial animals throughout the park, including native trout. It is believed that the population in New Zealand is kept in check by a native parasite, but in North America it has no natural predators and may not easily be eradicated once established.

The New Zealand mud snail can survive several days outside of water, can withstand a wide range of temperatures, and are small enough to be inadvertently spread by many types of water users. All waters are vulnerable, from silted river bottoms to clear mountain streams. Since the snails reproduce asexually, it only takes ones attached to fishing gear, watercraft, pets, clothing or anything else that comes into contact with water to spread them.