

Invasive of the Week Watch: Rusty Crayfish

By: Tanner Ruechel

Have you ever had a bully take your lunch and kick you out of your usual lunch spot leaving you to roam the cafeteria hopelessly looking for a new seat even though you know they are all already taken? Native crayfish in local lakes such as Yellowstone and Blackhawk Lake know this experience all too well. The bully? The bully is the Rusty Crayfish, identified by a rust colored patch on each side of the carapace directly behind its claws. Luckily this aggressive invasive has not been found in Lake Redstone or Dutch Hollow Lake yet.



Rusty Crayfish begin their assault on your lake by bullying native crayfish out of their traditional territory. Without their usual shelter and food sources native crayfish stand little chance of surviving. They are either eaten by fish in the open water or live long enough to starve. Invasive crayfish are also much better at avoiding predatory fish which usually keep native crayfish populations in check. While native crayfish are being pushed out of their homes, the Rustys' feast like pigs on plant life chopping it up and allowing fragments to drift with the current. Lakeshore owners may perk an ear at the sound of this but I assure you not to get your hopes up. Present in both Lake Redstone and Dutch Hollow Lake is Eurasian Water-milfoil, which many lake users are all too familiar with. Milfoil spreads primarily by fragmentation causing native plants that do not spread as effectively in this way to be strongly disadvantaged as plant fragments float around the lake. This could create a dangerous combo of crayfish spreading milfoil and milfoil feeding more crayfish. In addition to grazing on aquatic plant life, Rusty Crayfish may harm native fish population by feeding on native fish eggs and young.

If you would like to help stop native crayfish from being bullied as well as prevent the spread of Rusty Crayfish and other invasive species from finding their way into Lake Redstone and Dutch Hollow Lake, please offer to volunteer a few hours any day this summer with Clean Boats Clean Waters by contacting Tanner Ruechel through email ruechelt@gmail.com or phone (920) 621-3282.