



*A pair of felt-soled wading boots.*  
(USFWS/Cheryl Anderson)

## Help make 2012 a great year for Alaska's native aquatics by going felt-free!

Winter may stand between anglers and their favorite Alaskan streams and rivers, but it's not too early to start thinking about getting a new pair of wading boots...without felt soles! Initially popular because they provide good traction on slippery streambeds, felt-soled wading boots are now known to have a major drawback: they provide an ideal vehicle for spreading tiny invasive species that can cause big problems.

***New Zealand mudsnails.*** These tiny asexual snails don't need another snail around to reproduce and can reach densities as high as a half-million per square yard! At those densities, they can literally starve a stream: no algae and detritus for aquatic insects means no food for fish. These snails have spread across blue ribbon trout streams from the Pacific Northwest to the Great Lakes region.

***Didymo, a.k.a. "rock snot."*** Forming a thick stringy mat over rocks and other submerged surfaces, this diatom can completely smother a lake or stream. *Didymo* is native to some parts of Alaska, but has been spreading and growing more aggressively in recent years. The invasion of *didymo* in New Zealand prompted a ban on the use of felt soled wading boots in 2008.

***Myxobolus cerebralis.*** This parasite infects trout and salmon, causing skeletal deformities and neurological damage, especially in young trout. Infected fish swim in a corkscrew-like pattern (hence the name "whirling disease"), making feeding difficult and increasing their chance of being eaten by predators. This whirling disease pathogen sticks to felt soles more readily than other wading equipment materials and has been confirmed in southcentral Alaska.

Other states and countries have spent millions to prevent or control the spread of aquatic invasive species and have lost millions in revenue. In Maryland and Vermont, felt sole bans went into effect in March and April 2011, respectively. The Wyoming Game and Fish Commission has implemented a regulation requiring all watercraft using Wyoming waters to display an Aquatic Invasive Species decal.

In an effort to prevent the arrival or spread of these and other potentially devastating aquatic invasive species in Alaska, the Alaska Board of Fisheries voted unanimously to prohibit the use of felt soled wading boots in Alaska's freshwater streams beginning January 1, 2012. Alaska enacted this new regulation as a preventive measure because of the threat to native species and the ecological stability of our pristine waters, as well as the potential economic and environmental threat to commercial, sport and subsistence fisheries.

Many excellent felt sole alternatives, at a wide range of prices, are coming on to the market and should be increasingly available both online and locally. More information on prevention and spreading of aquatic invasive species can be found on the following websites: <http://cleananglingpledge.org/> and <http://www.protectyourwaters.net/>.



*Anglers enjoying Alaska's valuable fisheries resources (USFWS/Katrina Mueller)*