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**EASTPORT: Sea squirts, feared as invasive, rising in Cobscook Bay**

An invasive species appears to be spreading in Cobscook Bay.

The tunicate *Didemnum*, or sea squirt, was first identified in the area by researchers near the former toll bridge between Eastport and Perry, but now it is being found in a number of areas of Cobscook Bay, and in substantial quantities. In some areas of the world it threatens to interfere with fishing as the species takes over the bottom.

Eastport fisherman Scott Emery said he found it on some old lobster traps near the weather buoy in Cobscook Bay. Joe Storey Jr. of Perry, who has a few traps near the Estes Head cargo pier, discovered quite a bit around the pilings, which he said has been there four or five years. "It seems quite widespread," he said.

Larry Harris, a University of New Hampshire professor of marine biology, estimates the amount on the pier pilings "could probably fill a dump truck." Along with having found it all over the bottom in Half Moon Cove this year, he noted that he saw it on the float next to the pier at Phoenix Salmon in Broad Cove. "I was surprised how much there was this year, and the size of the colony."

"It is a very impressive creature," Harris said of the pale sea squirt, which looks like spilled pancake batter and hangs down in tendrils.

A recent survey on Georges Bank found that sea squirts cover about 88 square miles of the bottom. In New England, it's been found from Connecticut to Eastport. In Maine, it's been seen in Casco Bay and Penobscot Bay, and especially around Damariscotta.

Harris expects it will not be as much a problem in the Cobscook Bay area as it is elsewhere, partly because the water is colder, so it can't grow as fast. It regresses during the winter, and it does not appear to grow in soft sediment, such as mud.

- *The Quoddy Tides*, [www.quoddytides.com](http://www.quoddytides.com)