

Infected waters pose quandary for those not wanting to spread invasive species

By Henry Brean, Las Vegas Review-Journal

The enemy is invisible to the naked eye and exists in numbers hard to comprehend – hundreds of trillions of them at every depth and in every cove.

In the five years since they were first discovered in Lake Mead, the population of invasive quagga mussels has grown tenfold.

UNLV researcher David Wong estimates that more than 1.5 trillion adult quaggas and 320 trillion microscopic mussel babies now populate the reservoir.

That's 80 to 160 quaggas for every gallon of water in the nation's largest man-made lake. If mussels were dollars, there would be enough of them to pay off the national debt 20 times over, with a few trillion bucks to spare.

"They are everywhere in the lake," says Wong, one of the nation's leading experts on the aquatic invader. "Almost every single rock has some mussels on it."

With no hope of eradication, Wong and other researchers are focused on protecting vital underwater infrastructure and keeping quaggas from spreading to other waterways.

Last weekend, the chips were stacked against them.

Memorial Day marks the first big boating weekend at Lake Mead, and it falls smack in the middle of a huge reproductive spike for the mussels.

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