Please help prevent the spread of invasive species in Wood County.

Contact us if you see any invasive species or want to become involved in any of the projects.

EDUCATION IS KEY!

Pittsville High School/Yellow River Project

Wood County Land Conservation Department is working in partnership with Pittsville High School students on a project to help control the invasive rusty crayfish. This crayfish is a native to streams in the Ohio River Basin (Ohio, Kentucky, Illinois, Indiana and Tennessee) and cause significant damage to local waterways in Wisconsin.

This project started in 2009 with a partnership between Wood County Land Conservation Department and the Golden Sands RC &D. We started with 26 traps borrowed from University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. We started trapping in June and trapped for the entire month. We trapped just over 15,000 rusty crayfish out of the Yellow River near Pittsville, WI. Instead of just throwing the captured crayfish away we frozen them and donated them to local wildlife rehabbers, including Bay Beach Wildlife Sanctuary in Green Bay, WI. Due to flooding in 2010 no trapping was done. In 2011 we enlisted the help of the Advanced Biology class at Pittsville High School to help with our rusty crayfish trapping in the Yellow River.

Updated 05/2016

Rusty Crayfish North Wood County Park Trapping Project

Wood County Land and Water Conservation Department
715-421-8475

HOW TO ID

Average 2 1/2 inches in length not including claws, which can average 2-3 inches themselves. Large claws with black bands and dark red/rusty spots on each side of the carapace (hard outer body covering). Claws are grayish-green to reddish-brown. Prefer bottom types of clay, silt, sand, gravel or rock. Like rocks, logs and other debris to hide around. Rusty crayfish need permanent water bodies that provide suitable water quality year round.

LIFECYCLE

Rusty Crayfish reproduce quickly and females lay from 80-575 eggs. Eggs are attached to the swimmerets on the underside of the crayfish abdomen or tail section until the hatch, pictured below. Once the water temperatures rise the rusty crayfish eggs begin to hatch around late April or May.

WHY ARE THEY BAD

Rusty Crayfish displace native crayfish through three primary ways: 1.) Crayfish to crayfish competition. Our natives don't stand a chance against these bigger more aggressive invaders. 2.) Increased fish predation on native crayfish. Rusty crayfish force native crayfish out of the good hiding spots making them easier targets. Rusty crayfish are bigger with larger claws so fish go after native crayfish because they are easier to get. 3.) Rusty crayfish eat twice as much as a native crayfish so there is no food left for the natives.

WHY SHOULD I CARE

Rusty crayfish tend to eat most aquatic plants in a water body, these plants help prevent erosion. The loss of these plants destroy fish habitat along with quality of the lake. Because of their increased aggressiveness fish will only eat native crayfish not rusty crayfish. Rusty's eat twice as much as native crayfish, including fish eggs, small fish and invertebrates (animals with no backbone) which affects the food chain for the bigger fish. With a higher ratio of exoskeleton to soft tissue the food quality with rusty crayfish is not as high as the invertebrates they are replacing. With less food and lower quality food, fish survival will decrease.

WHAT WE CAN DO

Intensive trapping will not eradicate rusty crayfish but may help reduce adult populations and minimize some impacts. When the rusty crayfish population decreases; aquatic plants, invertebrates and fish populations increase. If you think you found a rusty crayfish infestation, contact the Wood County Land Conservation Office.

BEST METHOD IS TO PREVENT INTRODUCTION.

QUICK FACTS

- Came from Ohio River Basin and have expanded in WI since 1960
- Dark red/rusty spots on each side of the carapace
- Body average length of 2 1/2 inches long, claws average length of 2-3 inches long.
- Females lay 80-575 eggs
- Eat twice as much as native crayfish
- Displace native crayfish by: direct competition, increased fish predation, and lack of food
- Best method of control is not to introduce in the first place.