

Eastern Heath Snail Detected in Cascade County (15 August, 2012)

On August 9th, 2012 the detection of the Eastern Heath Snail (Mollusca: Hygromiidae, *Xerolenta obvia* (Menke)) in Cascade County, Montana was confirmed by the USDA national malacologist. The Eastern Heath Snail is slightly smaller than a dime in diameter and is white with dark brown spiral bands. This snail feeds on a wide range of plants including, alfalfa, clover, lupine, wheat, barley, fruit trees, and weeds. The snails can be found on vegetation, under rocks, boards, or attached to other hard surfaces including homes and barns. This species is known for climbing on vegetation, fence posts, and other upright objects to escape high temperatures and will aggregate in enormous numbers in a behavior called massing. The snails were observed during this massing behavior about 15 miles southeast of Great Falls along State Highways 200, 331, and 89. Individual snails numbered in the hundreds of thousands and may actually represent a population in the millions of snails. The snail prefers dry grassy areas and survives long periods of dry conditions by withdrawing into its shell and sealing the opening with a mucous membrane.



Photo by I. Foley

Photo by D. Rise

The Eastern Heath Snail is native to Eastern Europe but has been introduced into eastern North America in Ontario, Canada and Detroit, Michigan. The detection in Montana is the first population reported in

western North America. The snail readily attaches to hard surfaces such as rail cars, international, shipping containers, stone and granite tile, and other conveyances used in international trade.

This new snail pest has the potential to reduce crop yield and quality, contaminate fruits, vegetables, and hay, and transmit plant and animal diseases.

The Montana Department of Agriculture is working with the United States Department of Agriculture Animal Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) to determine the extent of the population and possible local origin of this new to Montana pest. Any sightings of suspect snails should be reported to the Montana Department of Agriculture (406-444-9430 or agr@mt.gov), USDA APHIS (406-449-5210), or your local Montana State University county extension office. Snails and other mollusks are known to transmit a number of human diseases and handling snails should be avoided. If you come into contact with any snails wash your hands and other contacted skin surfaces with warm soapy water. Additional information on the distribution, observed hosts, control measures, and any regulations to prevent the movement of this pest will be communicated to stakeholders when the information is available.



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Additional Info: USDA Temperate Terrestrial Gastropod response guideline:

http://www.aphis.usda.gov/import_export/plants/manuals/emergency/downloads/nprg_temp_terr_gastro.pdf

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