

Water managers keep eye on algae

By *WHITNEY ROYSTER*

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JACKSON -- Water managers for some Wyoming rivers are looking into a new-found algae problem that can have devastating effects on waterways, but they're not planning any dramatic action.

Rob Gipson, Jackson regional fisheries biologist for the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, said his agency is not doing anything to kill or control the algae didymo, commonly called "rock snot," that was found in a tributary of the Snake River.

"We'll continue to look for anything that's out of the ordinary and continue to sample other areas, but more for documenting locations rather than assuming something bad is going to happen," Gipson said.

Gipson said scientists helping water managers are "most intrigued" by what causes the nuisance bloom of didymo, which is found in Wyoming as part of its natural range.

He said the level of didymo found in Lake Creek is not a nuisance level, and officials are trying to determine what makes it become a nuisance rather than just algae occurring in the stream.

Dave Gloss, a hydrologist with the Medicine Bow-Routt National Forest and Thunder Basin National Grassland, said his agency is trying to inventory the occurrence of didymo and learn about its ecology.

He said the presence of didymo, found in the Nash Fork and Libby Creek, was not startling, but does represent a new issue for the forest.

He also said the agency will work to educate the public about how the algae is spread and what people can do to prevent that.

Didymo was also found earlier this summer in Encampment Creek of Purgatory Gulch in southern Wyoming. It has also been found in the Middle Fork of the Popo Agie River near Lander.

The algae forms a kind of mat on the river bottom and can suffocate aquatic life that is important to fish. Although didymo is native to parts of Wyoming, its presence in a creek can prove devastating. In New Zealand, where didymo is not native, fisheries managers have closed entire waterways and poisoned the streams to get rid of the algae.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, it is not possible to get rid of didymo once it has infected a waterway.

The algae is widely thought to be human borne, spread by water recreationists not cleaning boats, kayaks, whitewater rafts, waders and other supplies before entering new waterways.

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