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OREGON INVASIVE SPECIES COUNCIL

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PRESS RELEASE

THERE'S NO ROOM AT OREGON'S INN FOR THE RUSTY CRAYFISH

SALEM, Oregon—If Oregon's native crayfish could dream, the rusty crayfish would be their worst nightmare.

A native of the Ohio River basin, the rusty crayfish is larger and more aggressive than Oregon's native crayfish species. The rusty crayfish has a higher metabolic rate and voracious appetite for aquatic plants. And unlike native crayfish, which flee from most predators, the rusty crayfish uses its oversized claws to fend off enemies — and win sparring contests with native crayfish.

"Like all invasive species, non-native crayfish have characteristics that give them a leg up on native species," said Oregon State University Sea Grant's Sam Chan. "The rusty crayfish is an aggressive invader that has changed the characteristics of the Great Lakes regions where it invaded in the 1960s, rapidly spread, outcompeting native crayfish species, virtually eliminating aquatic plants, and ultimately negatively affecting native fish populations."

In Oregon, a population of rusty crayfish, the first recorded west of the Continental Divide, was recently confirmed along a stretch of the John Day area between Dayville and Mt. Vernon. Compared to the species of crayfish native to Oregon, the rusty crayfish is far more aggressive in dominating habitats, consuming aquatic plants (food), and outcompeting out native species.

Eliminating or reducing aquatic plants in a water body is the equivalent of gutting the inside of a house — the quality of the living space is significantly reduced. Aquatic plants in ponds provide habitat for invertebrates, which provide food for fish, waterfowl, and shorebirds. Aquatic plants also provide shelter for fish and native crayfish and nesting substrate for fish. Aquatic plants even help to reduce erosion by minimizing waves.

That begs the question: Why is the rusty crayfish and other bad crayfish characters, like red swamp crayfish, on the move, expanding their distribution? Despite their unwelcome characteristics, biologists suspect non-native crayfish are making their way into Oregon water bodies a number of ways — introduced by anglers that use them for fishing bait, by classrooms that order them from biological supply companies for science projects and then release them to the wild, and by intentional introductions from people that may prefer backyard crawfish boils to salmon bakes to celebrate the advent of spring.

“We are fortunate that many streams in Oregon have not been altered by the impacts of invasive species,” said Oregon Invasive Species Council Vice-Chair Rian Hooff. “But Oregon is at a critical juncture. We have to decide whether or not we want Oregon to remain Oregon, or whether invasive species will be allowed to increasingly chip away at the native ecosystems that define our state and support our lifestyles and livelihoods.”

For now, everyone agrees that the only welcoming sign the rusty crayfish should see when it enters Oregon is, “No room at the inn.”

The mission of the Oregon Invasive Species Council is to conduct a coordinated and comprehensive effort to keep invasive species out of Oregon and to eliminate, reduce, or mitigate the impacts of invasive species already established in Oregon.

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