Felt-Soled Waders: A Slippery Slope Toward Contamination

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Brianna Gibbs/KMXT

As the salmon make their way up stream, and the rivers of Kodiak bustle with eager anglers, Fish and Game wants to remind sportsfishermen about the ban on footgear with absorbent felt on the soles.

Tyler Polum is a Fisheries Biologist for Fish and Game and said felt-bottomed shoes aren't illegal, but rather, not permitted in freshwater. This is to prevent the spread of invasive and potentially dangerous microbes.

-- (Felt Soles 1 : 16 "They're not illegal in the state of Alaska as a whole, but starting January first this year you are no longer allowed to sport fish with felt-soled waders and this next January first you will no longer be able to hunt with felt-soled waders. So there's no law saying you have to quit selling these but you cannot sport fish this year with felt-soled waders.")

Tammy Davis is the invasive species coordinator for Fish and Game in Juneau and said the ban is an attempt to stop the spread of invasive species, a growing problem in Alaska's freshwaters.

-- (Felt Soles 2 : 37 "In

2010, Trout Unlimited, when they learned that there was support by the board of fisheries to reduce potential vectors for invasive species, Trout Unlimited took up the cause and submitted a proposal to the board that would make felt or absorbent waters not legal in freshwater for the entire state. So in 2010 that passed and the board decided to give the public time to transition, and so they gave the public until 2012 to switch to the new waders.")

Davis said much of the research that links felt-soled boots to various invasive species has been done in Southeast Alaska, where the law was first put into effect. Some of the most common freshwater invaders are New Zealand mud snails, Didymo (Diddy-moe), also known as rock snot, and the parasite that causes whirling disease, a neurological disorder that can cause skeletal deformities in salmon and trout that makes them swim in circles.

While the new law may be a pain for anglers, Davis said she hopes they will respect the fact that it will protect the fisheries.

As for enforcement of the law in Kodiak, Wildlife Trooper Alan Jones said he's not too concerned.

-- (WOTN 3 : 44 "We're not going to make anyone wade across the Pasagshak river just to look at their bottoms, you can see them if you're standing on the other side, again it's fairly obvious, once you see one you're going to know what you're looking at. And majority of the waders that are one piece with one piece shoes on them, waders wear out quick enough that natural use is only going to have them available or around for a couple years and like I say the manufacturers have shied away from using them because they knew it was going to be a non sale item in the lower 48 and now Alaska. So personally, I've been on the rivers a fair amount this spring, I haven't contacted anybody with felt bottom shoes anymore and it's just something you happen to glance at, it's not like the whole post is trying to go out and crack down on this.")

Jones said those caught using felt-soled waders will be given a warning. He said additional violations of the law will receive further punishment. ###