

Valley Angler

The Personal Washing Station

by Bill Thompson

Just about three years ago didymo was first discovered in the Connecticut River near the Canadian border. Didymo, better known as Rock Snot, is an invasive species that has found its way to trout streams all across the country. Rock snot does not attack trout it simply coats the stream bottom with a sticky substance that suffocates all life it comes in contact with thus eliminating all of the trout's food sources.

Rock snot is no doubt spread in many different ways, but there is no question that one of the biggest culprits is us. Fishermen, especially those of us who wade streams and wear felt soled wading boots, are likely carriers. Not long ago I wrote an article on how the fly fishing industry is phasing out felt soled boots and replacing them with rubber soled boots in order to combat rock snot. Unfortunately the use of rubber soled boots is not going to end the problem of spreading rock snot. The only sure way to stop this hardy one celled organism is to thoroughly wash all of your gear that comes in contact with it. Strong disinfectants or a bleach solution will both work.

Another alternative to bleach and disinfectants is to use a salt solution. New Zealand has been especially hard hit with rock snot and has gone to great lengths to come up with solutions to combat its spread. One of the most effective washing agents turned out to be a simple salt solution. To this end the "personal washing station" was created.

I first heard of the "personal washing station" was last fall when my Orvis sales rep visited the shop. He had just come from calling on Mike Holts fly shop, Fly Fishing Only, in Maine. Mike had been looking for ways to combat rock snot and had come across some of the research from New Zealand regarding the salt wash. Mike decided that personal washing station would work just as well in Maine and set out to make them available to Maine anglers. Mike reached out to his local Trout Unlimited Chapter, Kennebec River, and through them was able to find funding to bring the stations to his home state.

It wasn't a great stretch of the imagination to come to the conclusion that personal washing stations would work just as well right here in New Hampshire. Following Mike's lead in getting his local Trout Unlimited Chapter involved two New Hampshire T. U. chapters and three New Hampshire fly shops have come together to make these stations available to Granite State anglers. The two T. U. chapters are Saco valley Anglers and the Basil Woods, Jr. chapter. The three fly shops are W. S. Hunter, of Concord, Hanover Outdoors, in Hanover and North Country Angler, right here in North Conway.

So what is a Personal Washing Station? The PWS is pretty simple; a five gallon plastic bucket with a water tight lid with a few cups of salt is all that is required. In order to put the PWS in action fill the bucket with four gallons of water and add three cups of salt. Once the salt has dissolved insert your wading boots and securely place the lid on the bucket. Agitate the solution and let set for three minutes. Tip the bucket upside down, in order to ensure the boots are thoroughly submerged and repeat the action. Once the boots have been washed the waders should also be immersed in the solution as well. Wading staffs and landing nets are also carriers of rock snot and should also be washed. The salt mix will last for as long as a week with out having to be changed. Fishermen out for a week of fishing can carry a PWS along with them and have the ability to wash their gear every time they leave a stream.

As of last week the PWS will be available at all of the participating shops for a small fee or donation to Trout Unlimited. As long as our supply lasts, at the North Country Angler, we will give a free PWS to every customer who purchases a pair of waders or wading boots. If you wish to purchase one you may make a donation to Saco Valley Anglers. We think that any responsible angler fishing in New Hampshire should make a personal washing station part of their everyday fishing kit.

See you on the river.