

2026 HOUSE BILL 1157

THE URGENT NEED FOR STRENGTHENED MUSSEL PREVENTION IN SOUTH DAKOTA

South Dakota faces a growing and urgent threat from the continued spread of invasive zebra mussels—tiny, fast-reproducing species that have already proven devastating to ecosystems and economies across the US. Once established, these mussels are impossible to eradicate, clogging water systems, damaging infrastructure, reducing water quality, and jeopardizing revenue streams tied to recreation, hydropower, and agriculture. Immediate and proactive prevention is not simply an environmental necessity—it is sound economic policy.

South Dakota Lakes & Streams Association commissioned a study estimating the economic costs to stakeholders from zebra mussel infestation. The full study will be available April 1. Some evidence of costs sustained by South Dakota facilities:

Hydropower. Three of the four Army Corp of Engineers hydropower facilities have collectively reported spending **\$1.7 million** since 2018 on technologies to prevent mussel colonization, **\$360,000** in increased maintenance and chemical costs, **\$65,000** in monitoring costs, and **\$650,000** in lost power production at Gavins Point.

Municipal Water Treatment. WEB Water spent **\$1.9 million** in 2021 on a new, copper-coated intake screen and **\$80,000** annually in maintenance costs. The Randall Community Water District reported investing \$145,000 in 2021 on a chemical injection system and needed retrofits; other costs included installing additional filters, antifouling coatings, modifications to existing equipment, and increased chemical costs.

Golf Courses. In 2025 Cattail Crossing Golf Course in Watertown, with water pulled from Lake Kampeska, spent \$25,000 on a new injector system, **\$25,000** replacing zebra mussel plugged sprinkler heads, and projects **\$5,000–\$7,000** in yearly costs to maintain the system. Lakeview Golf Course in Mitchell has invested **\$55,000** in a new filtration system and will be purchasing a chemical injection system in 2026.

These initial costs represent only a fraction of what widespread infestation would demand. Actual costs rise rapidly with infestation spread and facility complexity. Once mussels colonize a major waterway, the burden expands beyond hydropower, utilities and agriculture—recreation, property values, and local tax revenues decline in tandem.



Intake trash racks at Fort Randall (2024).

Agriculture is key to South Dakota's economy and culture. While irrigators have yet to experience widespread economic impacts, they have expressed serious concern about reduced pumping capacity and increased labor needs to clear sprinkler systems. Using cost estimates of \$1.85—\$2.78 per acre-ft, we estimate the range of potential economic impact to irrigators would be **\$304,000–\$458,000 yearly**, based on annual appropriation of surface water and probability of zebra mussel establishment given physical characteristics of the waterbody.



Weed harvest at Lake Kampeska totaled 4,000 lbs (2024), all collected 100' from shoreline, at just one lake property.

Recreation is important to South Dakotans' quality of life and local economies. Marinas along the Missouri River have already reported fouling on docks and boats. Recreational and tournament fishing are important economic drivers for many lake and river communities in South Dakota. Zebra mussels negatively impact fish populations and are likely to reduce the number of viable fishing tournaments in the Glacial Lakes region of the state. We estimate that South Dakota could plausibly lose between four and seven fishing tournaments annually due to zebra mussel infestations. Local communities could lose **\$590,000–1,080,000** in business activity if zebra mussel infestation lead to fewer fishing tournaments. The same communities would lose **\$210,000–\$380,000** in personal income and **\$16,000–\$28,000** in local sales tax revenue.

Preventing further spread is vastly more cost-effective than managing established infestations. Prevention costs are measured in thousands; containment and mitigation in millions. The state must therefore invest aggressively in watercraft inspection, rapid response capabilities, containment strategies, and continuous public education.

Every dollar spent today on prevention safeguards South Dakota's economic future. Inaction risks irreversible damage—to critical water supplies, regional industries, and the recreational resources that define our communities. Protecting South Dakota's waters from Dreissenid mussels is more than an environmental imperative—it is a defense of our economy, heritage, and way of life.

For more information, please contact

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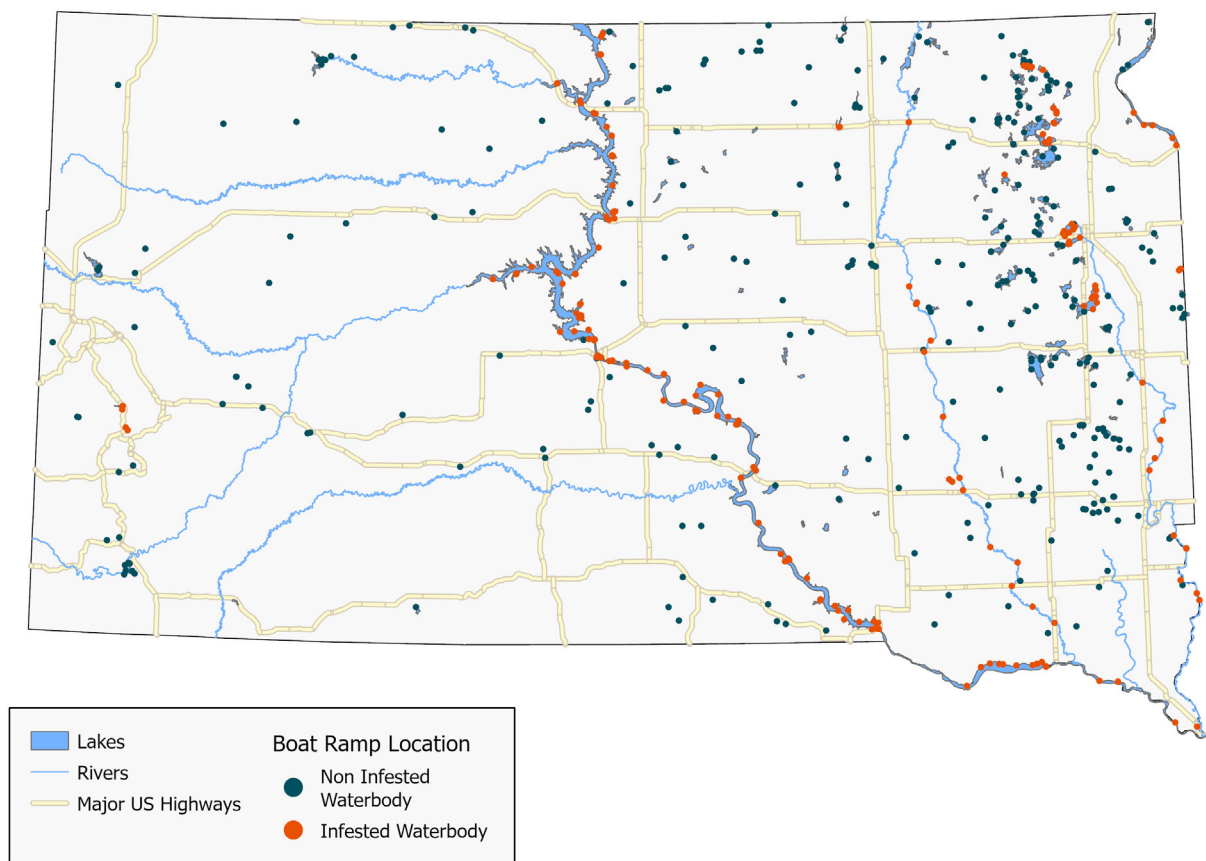


Fig. 1. Extent of water bodies susceptible to zebra mussel establishment based on boat ramp locations (vector of introduction) and physical factors favorable to zebra mussel survival (calcium and pH concentrations).

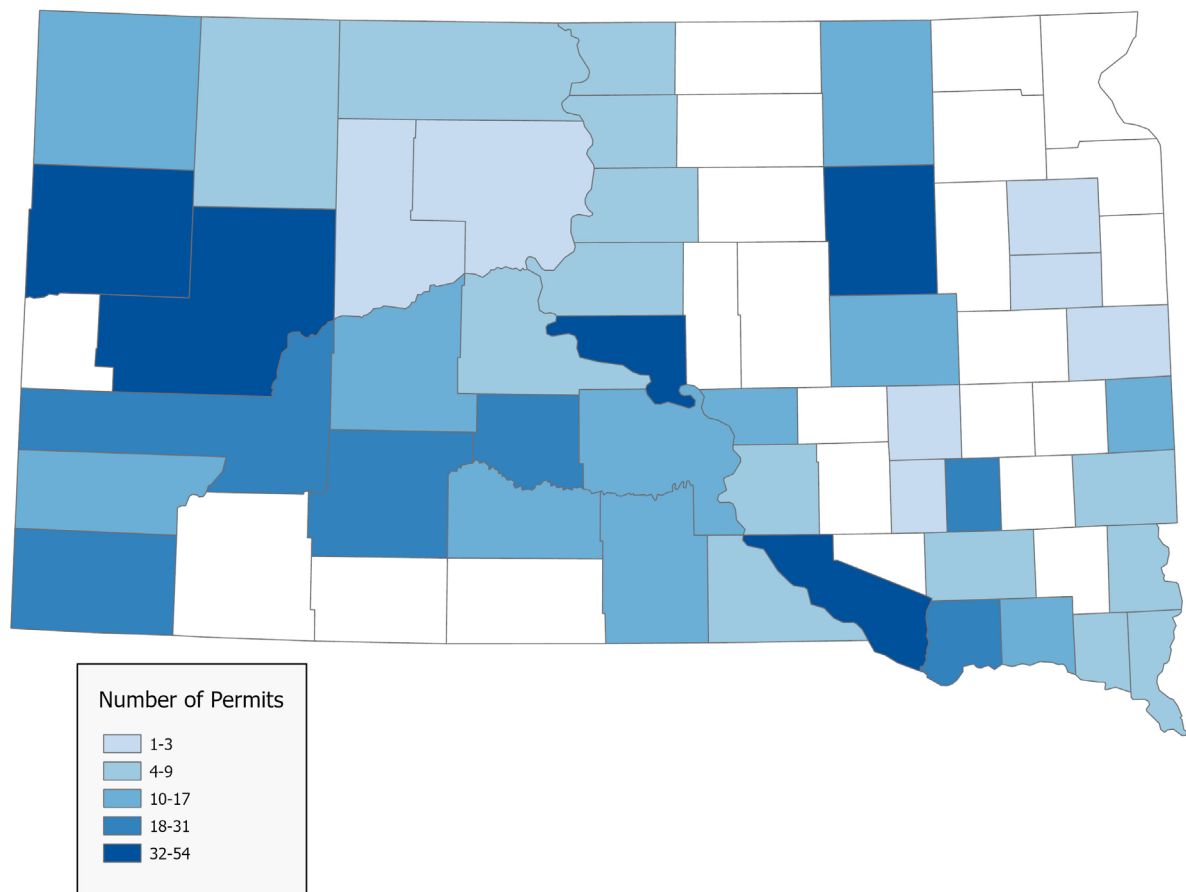


Fig. 2. Distribution of South Dakotan irrigators with surface water withdrawal permits that will be vulnerable to zebra mussel fouling and associated mitigation costs.