

Felt-Soles Ban - FAQ

What exactly does Maryland's felt-soled wader ban do?

The regulation states "An individual may not use footgear with external felt soles in State waters or within five feet of State waters."

Why are felt-soled waders and boots so bad?

Didymo, (*Didymosphenia geminata*) or "Rock Snot" is an invasive alga of cold flowing waters. Individual didymo organisms are microscopic, but infestations include enormous numbers, and each individual produces a long stalk from the stream bottom. The resulting mass is a yellow-brown slime layer that can dominate the rivers and streams. Didymo infestations in North America are sufficiently new that scientists can only guess at the long-term ecological consequences. Dramatic changes in stream biology have been verified. (See [Relationships between nuisance blooms of *Didymosphenia geminata* and measures of aquatic community composition in Rapid Creek, South Dakota](#) by Aaron M. Larson, South Dakota Department of Environment and Natural Resources (September 2007); [Increase in Nuisance Blooms and Geographic Expansion of the Freshwater Diatom *Didymosphenia geminata*](#) by S.A. Spaulding and L. Elwell, USGS (2007); [The non-indigenous diatom *Didymosphenia geminata* alters benthic communities in New Zealand rivers](#) by C. Kilroy, S. T. Larned, B. J. F. Biggs, *Freshwater Biology*, Vol. 54, Issue 9, pages 1990-2002 (2009).) Didymo is extremely unsightly and makes waterways unattractive to recreational users.

Tragically, the list of places infected in the rapid spread of didymo reads like a catalog of the finest fly-fishing waters on the planet. Resources managers in North America, and especially in New Zealand, guessed early on that the felt-soled waders of traveling fly fishermen were the pathway for its spread. Subsequent field and laboratory demonstrated that the felt sole is an almost perfect medium for its spread.

Does the regulation ban felt-soles in tidal waters?

Yes. Felt-soles are banned in all State waters. Enforcement and the effectiveness of the regulation would be impaired if the ban only included non-tidal waters.

Why ban felt-soles versus other materials?

Recent studies have found that the felt material can retain and transfer a variety of harmful organisms at a much higher rate than other commonly used materials. Because felts may remain damp for days after use these organisms remain more viable than when

carried by other materials. For more information, read: [“Adherence of Myxobolus cerebralis Myxospores to Waders: Implications for Disease Dissemination”](#) by Kiza K. Gates, et al., *North American Journal of Fisheries Management*, vol. 28, pages 1453–1458 (2008).

What might be the consequences of introducing these organisms?

At the very least fishing can be difficult or impossible due to fouling of tackle by didymo. At the extreme fish populations could be negatively impacted by direct effects or through disruption of the food chain. This photo from New Zealand illustrates an extreme case.



Where can I resole my boots and waders?

A number of companies now offer resoling services. This is often a less expensive alternative to purchasing new boots or waders. A list of companies which offer resoling services can be found at: www.simmsfishing.com/site/streamtread.html.

Can I trade-in my felt-soled boots or waders?

Some companies have offered trade-in deals for felts. It is best to check with each company prior to purchasing to see what deals they may be currently offering.

I'm afraid of slipping, are other materials as safe as felts?

Other materials can be just as safe as felt and depending on the surface other materials may be safer than felt. There are a variety of sticky surface bottoms available which provide excellent gripping capabilities. Our DNR survey crews have been using the new

boots for several years now with good results. Please talk with your local retailers to find out about the latest technology.

What is the penalty for violating this regulation?

The prepayable fine for a felt-soled wader violation is \$125. Maximum penalties for all fisheries related violations are \$1000 for a first offense and \$2000 for a second offense, should you choose to contest the violation in court.

I haven't heard of the felt-soled ban before. How did the Department advertise this to the public?

Back in 2009, the Department started placing Wader Washer Stations around areas where they had located Didymo in state waters. After further monitoring and concern of spreading Didymo and other invasive organisms and diseases, the Department began scoping the idea of a felt-soled wader/boot ban in March 2010. The Department discussed this at its non-tidal public meetings throughout the spring of 2010 and scoped the idea at its May 2010 Fisheries Service regulatory scoping meeting. Additionally, the Department posted this idea up on its draft regulations webpage in May 2010 and took emailed comments on this idea until it was proposed in December 2010. The idea was scoped a second time at the September 2010 Fisheries Service regulatory scoping meeting. Throughout the summer and fall of 2010, the Department sent information about the idea of a ban to stakeholders, put posters at sporting shows and fairs and worked with the media to get out information. Once the regulation was proposed, the Department held a public hearing in Cumberland, Maryland in January 2011 and took nearly 44 days worth of public comment (approximately 2 weeks longer than required by law). During the public comment time period, the Department again reached out to the media to help disseminate information. The Department handed out information cards through 2011.