

# STOP

# The Invasion



Photographs courtesy of Tom Heutte, U.S.D.A Forest Service, and U.S. Geological Survey

## Non-Native Crayfish

*Procambarus clarkia*,  
*Orconectes virilis*, and  
*Orconectes rusticus*

## Report Sightings

1-877-9-INFEST  
[InvasiveSpecies.wa.gov](http://InvasiveSpecies.wa.gov)



### What are they?

Crayfish are freshwater crustaceans related to lobsters. The northern crayfish is native to Montana, Wyoming, the upper Mississippi River, the Great Lakes drainages, and the Hudson River. The red swamp crayfish is the most widely introduced crayfish in the world. They are usually found in brooks and streams where there is running water and shelter against predators.

### Are they here yet?

Yes, the red swamp crayfish was first found in Pine Lake in King County. It since has become widespread in the Sammamish basin. The northern crayfish is present throughout the Columbia River from Grand Coulee dam to the Chief Joseph dam and in several lakes in the Columbia basin. The most likely means of introduction was the release into the wild of live bait, aquarium pets, or laboratory organisms.

### Why should I care?

The rapidly-reproducing northern crayfish is likely to displace the native crayfish populations by competing with them for food and habitat. They also may impact fish populations through competition, predation, or habitat modification.

### How can we stop them?

Because crayfish are introduced by humans, responsible disposal of unused bait can prevent their spread. Anglers should make sure their bait suppliers don't sell non-native crayfish and should avoid using non-native crayfish as bait. Non-native crayfish may not be legally purchased or transported in Washington but they may be harvested as part of the legal limit. If caught, they must be kept separate containers from native crayfish.

### What should I do if I find a Nutria?

Call: 1-877-9-INFEST or report online at [www.InvasiveSpecies.wa.gov](http://www.InvasiveSpecies.wa.gov).



Photograph courtesy of Ernie Buchanan, Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife

## Non-native crayfish characteristics

- The claws of all of the non-native species are stronger than those of native species, and usually have bumps or spines.
- Northern crayfish adults reach a maximum length of 5 inches. Rusty crayfish adults reach 4 inches in length.

## Red swamp crayfish characteristics

- Red swamp crayfish are dark red with raised, bright red spots covering the body and claws, and a black wedge-shaped stripe on the top of the abdomen.
- They vary in length between 2 to 5 inches.
- Occasionally, a genetic mutation may turn the body and/or claws blue; however all other features including the red, raised spots remain the same.

## Non-native crayfish may be confused with

- Identifying crayfish can be difficult. Positive identification requires looking at a number of characteristics and having enough experience to interpret them.
- There is only one native crayfish species in Washington; the signal crayfish, *Pacifasticus leniusculus*, which is fairly easy to identify. All its surfaces, even its claws, are uniformly brownish and smooth compared to other species.

## More information

[www.invasivespeciesinfo.gov/aquatics/rustycray.shtml](http://www.invasivespeciesinfo.gov/aquatics/rustycray.shtml)

[wdfw.wa.gov/fish/ans/identify/html/index.php?species=orconectes\\_rusticus](http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/ans/identify/html/index.php?species=orconectes_rusticus)

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