



Invasive Crayfish



Rusty crayfish have rust-colored spots on their sides. Photo: U.S. Geological Survey, Bugwood.org



Northern crayfish. Photo: Paige Kuczmariski, Alberta Invasive Species Council, Bugwood.org

What Are They?

Crayfish are freshwater crustaceans related to lobsters. In the Pacific Northwest, three species of invasive crayfish are present: Northern or virile crayfish (*Faxonius virilis*), rusty crayfish (*Orconectes rusticus*), and red swamp crayfish (*Procambarus clarkii*). The northern crayfish is native to Montana, Wyoming, the upper Mississippi River, the Great Lakes, and the Hudson River. The red swamp and rusty are native to the southeastern United States. These crayfish usually are 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 and since has become widespread in the Sammamish River 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 River basin. The rusty crayfish is known to be present only in the John Day River in Oregon.

Why Should I Care?

The rapidly-reproducing, non-native crayfish displace native crayfish by out-competing them for food and habitat. They also may impact fish populations through competition, predation, or habitat modification.

What Are Their Characteristics?

The claws of all the non-native species are stronger than those of native species and usually have bumps or spines.

 **Report Sightings**



Invasivespecies.wa.gov

Northern or Virile Crayfish

- An adult may reach 5 inches long.
- Its shell is mostly chestnut-brown. Its legs are blue-gray to emerald green and attached to the claws. Legs often have black and blue spots and cream or yellow spines.



Red swamp crayfish. Photo: U.S. Geological Survey, Bugwood.org

Rusty Crayfish

- An adult may reach 4 inches long.
- It has large, rust-colored spots on both sides of its shell and black bands on the tips of its claws.

Red Swamp Crayfish

- This crayfish can be between 2-5 inches long. It is dark red with raised, bright red spots covering its body and claws, and a black, wedge-shaped stripe on the top of the abdomen.
- Occasionally, a genetic mutation may turn the body and/or claws blue; however, all other features including the red, raised spots remain the same.

How Do I Distinguish Them From Native Species?

The signal crayfish, *Pacifasticus leniusculus*, is the only one native crayfish in Washington. All its surfaces, even its claws, are uniformly brownish and smooth compared to other species. Use this guide to distinguish it from other species: <https://invasivespecies.wa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Crayfish-Comparison.pdf>.

How Can We Stop Them?

Responsible disposal of unused bait may 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 bought or transported in Washington but may be harvested as part of the legal limit. If caught, they must be kept in separate containers from native crayfish.

What Should I Do If I Find One?

Report immediately via the WA Invasives mobile app or reporting web form at <https://invasivespecies.wa.gov/report-a-sighting/>.