

Alaska's Ban on Felt soled Wading Footwear- FAQ

How does Alaska's new regulation on felt soled footwear affect anglers?

The new regulation prohibits the use of footwear with felt or fibrous material on the soles when sport fishing in freshwaters of the state. This regulation affects sport anglers and guides who assist in the taking of fish while in freshwaters statewide. It does not affect sport anglers fishing in salt water or while participating in personal use fisheries.

Why ban felt but not other materials?

The regulation prohibits the use of any fibrous material, not just felts. Research has shown that felt and fibrous materials trap and transfer a variety of harmful organisms, including pathogens and invasive species, more efficiently than other commonly used materials. Additionally, decontamination protocols are less effective on felts. The fibrous materials remain damp for days after use allowing these organisms to remain viable longer than when carried by other boot materials. The organisms held within felt are less affected by chemical solutions applied to decontaminate than treated felt alternatives.

What are some of the invasive species felts soles are thought to transfer?

- **New Zealand mudsnails.** These tiny asexual snails don't need another snail to reproduce, they can reach densities as high as a half-million per square yard. At those densities, they can starve a stream; no algae or detritus for aquatic insects means no food for fish. These snails have spread across trout streams from western states to the Great Lakes region.
- **Didymo, a.k.a. "rock snot."** Forming a thick, stringy mat over rocks and other submerged surfaces, this diatomaceous alga can smother lakes or streams. Didymo is native to some parts of Alaska, but has been spreading and growing more aggressively in recent years. The invasion of didymo in New Zealand initiated the first ban on the use of felt-soled wading boots in 2008.
- ***Myxobolus cerebralis.*** This parasite infects trout and salmon, causing skeletal deformities and neurological damage, especially in young trout. Infected fish swim in a corkscrew-like pattern (hence the common name "whirling disease"), making feeding difficult and increasing their chances of being eaten by predators. One life stage of this whirling disease pathogen easily embeds into felt soles more readily than other wading equipment materials. Genetic fragments of *Myxobolus cerebralis* were detected in Southcentral Alaska waters in 2007.

Can I re-sole my felt soled boots?

An online search found several commercial boot and shoe repair vendors advertising replacement of felt soles with non-felt alternative soles for wading footwear (boots and waders). Costs range was from \$50 - \$100 per pair. (ADF&G does not promote or endorse commercial vendors.)

Is it legal to dip my felt soles into some form of rubber to make them no longer absorbent?

ADF&G does not encourage folks to “seal” their felt soles with a coating. If any cracks or holes develop in the coating then the felt sole underneath would become “absorbent” again. It is probable that “sealed” felt would soon develop leaks. A “sealed” felt sole with any holes in the seal would retain water and contaminants and would very difficult to dry out or decontaminate.

I just bought new felts last year, can I trade them in?

ADF&G is not involved in a trade-in program. Check with the vendor from whom you purchased your felts or the company who made them to learn if they are sponsoring a trade-in option.

Felts save me from slipping in the water, are the new materials as safe?

Footwear manufacturers state that their research and development continue to work toward creating soles that provide excellent gripping capabilities. Some anglers report the new, non-felt soles provide better grip when the spikes are used.

What is the penalty for wearing felts?

Alaska Fish and Wildlife Troopers may issue citations to non-compliant anglers potentially resulting in a fine.

Have other states enacted regulations banning felt soled footwear?

Maryland took the lead by implementing their regulation prohibiting the use of footwear with felt soles in 2011. At different dates in 2012, Alaska, Missouri, Rhode Island and Vermont have/will put into action regulations banning the use of felt or fibrous, porous or absorbent materials on the soles of wading footwear. All states recognize that banning felt soles is not the silver bullet to reducing the potential for invasive species to be transferred on fishing gear. Along with the above-mentioned regulations, most states request that anglers Clean, Drain, and Dry all of their fishing gear to reduce the chance of spreading invasive species.

What can I do to avoid transferring invasive species?

CLEAN- Rinse and remove any mud, sediment, and/or plant debris from all gear, boats, and boat trailers, floatplane rudders and floats, and anything that comes into contact with water. Separate all pieces of wading footwear and waders (remove liners, etc.) to check for and remove visible mud, sediment and/or plant debris before leaving the area. Use a stiff bristle brush to clean all fishing gear.

DRAIN-Empty all water from coolers, bilge pumps, buckets, and wring out gear before leaving the boat launch or fishing areas.

DRY- Completely dry gear between systems or trips.

DECONTAMINATE-If drying is not possible, either freeze gear until solid or wash gear in 130°F hot water. If drying, freezing or heating gear is not feasible, use a 2% bleach solution to clean gear away from fresh water recreation sites. Spray or rinse gear for one minute. A 2% bleach solution can be made easily by mixing 2.5 oz. of chlorine bleach with tap water to make 1 gallon of solution.

NOTE: Bleach solutions may degrade gear made of absorbent materials. Please rinse gear on land, away from fresh water fishing areas and dispose of disinfectants as indicated on the label.

What should I do if I find a plant/animal/organism I think is invasive?

Note your location on a map, or note the GPS coordinates. Take a picture if you can. Call the ADF&G invasive species hotline: 1-877-INVASIV.