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For Immediate Release:

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Commercial Fishermen Asked to Watch For Invasive Chinese Mitten Crab

The New Hampshire Estuaries Project (NHEP) has launched a New England-wide campaign to enlist commercial fishermen in the effort to find invasive Chinese mitten crabs before they become established and cause problems for the fishing industry and the local estuaries. The NHEP designed and produced materials that will help those working in the marine environment to identify and report Chinese mitten crabs to local experts and resource managers. The goal of the campaign is to detect small colonizing crab populations before they become established.

Originally from Asia, the Chinese mitten crab is a medium-sized crab with white-tipped, hairy claws that has a history of invading new regions, specifically in Europe and the west coast of the United States, where it significantly disrupts ecological systems. A total of thirteen mitten crabs have been found on the east coast in the last three years, with the most recent observation in January 2008 in the Hudson River in Newburgh, NY.

The prolific mitten crabs pose a threat to fisheries and local ecosystems in both fresh and salt water habitats. Juvenile mitten crabs live in freshwater streams where they compete with native species for food and increase erosion by burrowing into stream banks. Adult crabs migrate to the sea where they have the potential to clog fish passage structures, foul fishing gear, and crowd-out some commercially significant species.

The NHEP outreach campaign is being implemented through a unique cooperative effort from Maine to New York. Campaign partners include Maine Coastal Program, Maine Sea Grant, Casco Bay Estuary Partnership, NHEP, NH Sea Grant, MIT Sea Grant, Narragansett Bay Project, and the RI Coastal Resources Management Council. Partners are distributing 4,000 information kits through a variety of means. NH Sea Grant will host a seminar in May for commercial fishermen to discuss the threat of marine invasive species and to distribute the Chinese mitten crab outreach materials. Contact NHEP Project Coordinator Dave Kellam at 862-3403 for more information.
