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Agency Of Natural Resources

Eric Palmer, Fish Division Director, VT Fish & Wildlife, 2/11/16

Three reasons to repeal the felt sole ban:

- 1) **New information.** When didymo blooms were first discovered in Vermont, the best information we had to act on indicated that this was a new invasive species of algae that could be spread by wet items such as felt soles. New scientific studies have found that this species is native and already distributed across North America. The best current science indicates that didymo blooms are the result of changes in phosphorus levels, and not the result of new introductions. Felt soles are not the vector we thought they were.
- 2) **Distraction from more effective spread prevention efforts.** Our best advice to the general public to prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species is to clean, drain and dry ALL gear before moving to a new river or lake. Focusing on felt soles may lead anglers to think that if they simply use a different type of boot they are “safe” from spreading ANS. This may be similar to my grandmother thinking that wearing a copper bracelet would cure high blood pressure: not only is the connection unsupported by science, but it also may distract people from taking more effective steps to address the problem.
- 3) **Safety.** Many anglers, and many F&W Department employees, think that felt soles are safer than other footwear for wading in streams and rivers. The felt soles give better and more consistent traction than other “non-felt” alternatives. We have heard from many older anglers that they simply will not go fishing if they can’t wear felt soles as they are unwilling to risk breaking an ankle or hip. Vermont fishing guides have told us that they have had scheduled clients from out-of-state cancel their fishing trips when they learned that felt soles were banned in Vermont. In summary, we think that repealing the felt sole ban is likely to benefit both ANS spread prevention efforts, and angler safety in Vermont.

