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SUN EDITORIAL:

# Promising, patient research

## UNLV biologist working on natural solution to quagga mussels in Lake Mead

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Scientists and lake managers in several states are trying everything from power washers to electric jolts to kill or at least manage quagga mussels.

So far, the thumbnail-sized, tough-shelled mussels — discovered nearly three years ago in Lake Mead — are winning.

But UNLV biologist David Wong is working with other researchers on a promising new weapon: the redear sunfish.

Distinguished by a red mark on its sides, this particular sunfish is nicknamed “the shellcracker” and has a proven appetite for quagga mussels.

Quagga mussels were found in the Great Lakes 20 years ago, having hitched rides on cargo ships arriving from the Atlantic Ocean. From there they migrated to other waterways by attaching themselves to boats and boat equipment. They were found in Lake Mead in January 2007.

The mussels produce millions of offspring that mass together, threatening water-delivery systems and other lake structures. They also filter essential nutrients and oxygen from the water, lessening the ability of other fish to survive.

Because it is unlikely that the mussels can ever be eliminated, it is important to find a way to control their population. For this reason Wong’s research is invaluable. Las Vegas Sun reporter Stephanie Tavares wrote about his work in a story that ran Wednesday.

We were glad to learn that he and his fellow researchers in other Western states are taking time to study possible consequences. Introducing massive quantities of redear sunfish into lakes where they exist now only in small quantities could cause unintended problems. Look what happened, for example, when people began dumping their pet exotic snakes into the Everglades. Its whole ecology is now threatened. Or when tamarisk plants were brought to the West from overseas in the 1800s. They are overtaking native plants and massively consuming a rare resource — water.

Wong hopes to see results from the redear sunfish research in another year or two. Let’s all hope it becomes a workable solution.