

# RUSTY CRAYFISH *Faxonius rusticus*



Peter W Chen, Wikipedia Commons



Paul Skawinski UW-Stevens Point Extension Lakes

**ADULT SIZE:** Up to 6 inches long.

**COLOR:** Body is light to dark brown with dark rusty colored spots on either side of the shell. Claws have black bands at the tips.

**DISTINGUISHING FEATURES:** Long antennae; closed claws create an oval shape. No notch in movable finger of claw, voracious eaters.

# RED SWAMP CRAYFISH *Procambarus clarkii*

**ADULT SIZE:** 2.2-4.7 inches in length.

**COLOR:** Dark red with red, raised spots on body and claws and a black wedge-shaped stripe on the top of the abdomen.

**DISTINGUISHING FEATURES:** Elongated claws with triangular nose. Notch in movable finger of claw, common species farmed for human consumption.



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# MARBLED CRAYFISH *Procambarus virginalis*



Lyko, Wikipedia Commons



Christian Huetter, Science.org

**ADULT SIZE:** 4-5 inches in length.

**COLOR:** Typically olive to dark brown, but can range from tan to reddish blue. Has a distinct marbled or streaked appearance on its back and claws.

**DISTINGUISHING FEATURES:** Slender claws. Can clone itself.

## DISTRIBUTION

Currently not found in Montana

### HABITAT:

Lakes, streams, ditches, and wetlands; red swamp crayfish and marbled crayfish can burrow whereas rusty crayfish cannot.

### NATIVE TO:

Ohio River Basin (Rusty Crayfish), Mississippi River Drainage and Gulf Coast (Red Swamp), no native range as it was created for pet trade (Marbled)

### PREVENTION AND SPREAD:

Crayfish invade from their native habitat mostly through human vectors, such as their use as fishing bait, fish forage and from illegal dumping and release of aquarium species. Once introduced, they can spread overland to connected waters. A single female can reproduce on her own using stored sperm and can lay 80-575 eggs. To prevent the spread of invasive crayfish it is important to not use the species as live bait and never release crayfish kept as pets or purchased live for crayfish boils.

### IMPACTS:

Invasive crayfish can be aggressive towards native crayfish species, which can cause their displacement. They can also impact native fish and invertebrate populations through competition and predation. Finally, invasive crayfish can alter plant communities through their consumption. Burrowing of invasive crayfish also alters habitat and increase sedimentation.

Sources:  
USGS, 2021

### NATIVE LOOKALIKES:

Generally, colors and patterns can vary greatly between crayfish even within the same species making correct identification difficult.

#### Virile/Northern crayfish,

*Faxonius virilis* is presumed to be native to areas of eastern MT though it has spread beyond its native range, including into western MT. It is the most common crayfish found in Montana. Identified generally by a narrow areola, bluish claws with white tubercles on them.

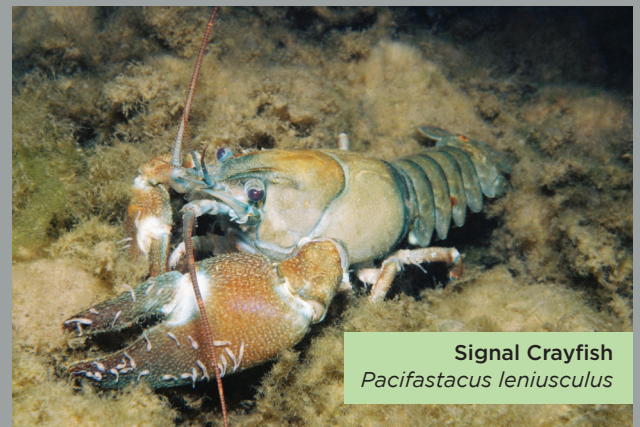


Virile/Northern Crayfish  
*Faxonius virilis*

Laura Gaudette

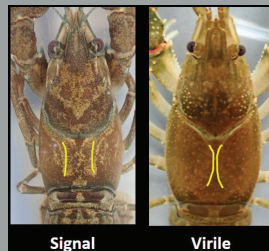
#### Signal crayfish,

*Pacifastacus leniusculus* is presumed to be native west of the continental divide but is also found outside its native range. Generally has smooth reddish claws that are bright red or orange underneath and a wider areola.



Signal Crayfish  
*Pacifastacus leniusculus*

USFWS



Areola\_Susie Adams  
USDA Forest Service

**Areola:** the space on the dorsal (back) surface of the carapace (shell) behind the head and in front of the tail, 2 plates come together like backwards parenthesis = )( The space between them can either be wide (signal crayfish) or narrow (virile crayfish).

If you suspect an infestation of an invasive crayfish take a photo of the full back of the crayfish and the belly side as close as possible for distinguishing characteristics. Report to Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks at the contact below.

If you see or suspect a new infestation of an invasive plant or animal, please save a specimen, and record the location.

Report observations to Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks at  
<https://fwp.mt.gov/conservation/aquatic-invasive-species/report-an-ais>  
Or call the MT FWP front desk at 406-444-2440



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