If you’ve spent time enjoying nature, you’ve probably heard the saying “take only pictures and leave only footprints.” But what if our footprints are leaving something behind? Our shoes, clothing, and gear spread invasive species and diseases that can throw off our ecological web’s delicate balance. Here are some steps you can take to prevent diseases and invasive species from tagging along with you on your adventures.

White-nose syndrome
White-nose syndrome (WNS), a disease caused by a fungus (Pseudogymnoascus destructans), is devastating North America’s bat population. Not all bats hibernate, but those that do are incredibly sensitive to disturbances. The extra energy they use when something wakes them up—like a human entering their cave or a fungus growing on their nose—is often enough to keep them from surviving winter. Since it was first identified in 2006, white-nose syndrome has spread through 33 states and by 2016 it had killed more than 6.7 million bats. The disease arrived in Wyoming last year, but hasn’t yet been confirmed in Teton County. Protecting our local bats now is critical for future generations of bats.

Individual amphibians can be tested for chytrid with a simple swab sample. In 2017, Teton Conservation District staff tested boreal toads, boreal chorus frogs, and Columbia spotted frogs at four randomly selected sites in Teton County. Of the 26 toads and frogs swabbed, 14 individuals tested positive for chytrid. Across the state, nine of Wyoming’s twelve amphibian species have tested positive. The good news is that our Wyoming boreal toads have shown to be harder against chytrid than their Colorado counterparts. Plains spadefoot, Great Basin spadefoot, and tiger salamander have not yet tested positive.

Aquatic invasive species
“A nasty aquatic invasive species to keep an eye out for is New Zealand mud snail (Potamopyrgus antipodarum). It’s a tiny (about the length of a grain of rice!) but very aggressive macroinvertebrate that was found in Fish Creek last year. It doesn’t have any natural predators here, so it has the potential to proliferate and push out native snails and insects that fish depend on for food. It can also live outside of water for up to 24 hours or on a damp surface for 50 days. This means they can survive between boat fishing trips by hiding in a crevice in your boat or a fold in your waders. Another aquatic invasive that recently appeared in the valley is yellow flag iris (Iris pseudacorus). It’s a pretty flower that was introduced as an ornamental in people’s gardens and has now spread into the wild. In addition to producing seeds, it propagates when parts of its rhizomes break off and take root elsewhere downstream. If you see yellow flag iris, report it to Teton County Weed and Pest and avoid walking through it so you don’t break off any rhizomes. It’s also a good reminder that when planning a garden, plant native species. You can check out our website, www.tetonconservation.org to find a native plants list.

For more information on how to help protect our wildlife and native species, check out Wildlife West: www.wildlifewest.org.

Teton Conservation District
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TERRESTRIAL INVASIVE SPECIES
Unbeknownst to us, seeds often hitch a ride on our stuff. When we incidentally introduce a nonnative plant into an environment where it doesn’t have natural predators, it has an unfair advantage over native plants and can take over. As stewards of our landscape, it’s our responsibility to clean our gear as we leave and enter recreation sites. You can commit to preventing the spread of invasive species by taking the “PlayCleanGo” pledge at playcleango.org. PlayCleanGo reminds us that after playing in the outdoors, you should clean your gear thoroughly before you go.

HUMANS AS A VECTOR

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