

NEWS RELEASE

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TAHOE WATERCRAFT INSPECTION PROGRAM PROVES SUCCESSFUL

Lake Tahoe, CA/NV— Boat inspectors at the Spooner Lake inspection station prevented a boat with 37 quagga mussels from entering Lake Tahoe last Sunday (August 7th). The boat had arrived from Lake Mead, a water body known to be infected with aquatic invasive species (AIS). This incident was the first evidence of quagga on a boat attempting to enter Lake Tahoe this year, according to officials at the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.

Inspectors from the Tahoe Resources Conservation District (Tahoe RCD) thoroughly decontaminated the vessel after the mussels were detected. Decontamination involved removing the mussels, flushing the boat and engine with hot water multiple times, followed by a power wash. The Nevada Department of Wildlife dispatched a Fish & Game Warden who released the boat after the decontamination was completed.

“This is more evidence that our boat inspection program is working,” said Julie Regan, Chief of External Affairs for the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency. “Detection through the watercraft inspection program is key to protecting Lake Tahoe from the devastating threat of aquatic invasive species.”

What inspectors are looking for is evidence of quagga and zebra mussels, New Zealand Mudsnaills, and other invasive species including aquatic weeds. These invasive species pose a serious threat to the Tahoe Basin’s unique natural environment and economy. A recent study estimated that the introduction of quagga mussels would cost \$20 million per year to the local economy in lost tourism and maintenance costs for water intake lines and other infrastructure.

Improvements brought online earlier this year to Lake Tahoe watercraft inspections are proving successful at reducing wait times for boaters while safeguarding Lake Tahoe from the risk of aquatic invasive species introduction.

According to Pete Brumis, Public Outreach Specialist for Tahoe RCD, “We are able to decontaminate more boats in less time as a result of new, high volume decontamination equipment purchased over the winter as an added convenience to boaters and to further reduce risk of AIS introduction in Lake Tahoe.”

Another reason for this increase in efficiency is that inspections are now taking place at five roadside stations around the Lake instead of at boat ramps where congestion made the inspection process more time consuming and difficult.

The Watercraft Inspection Program, which is staffed and managed by the Tahoe Resource Conservation District, is undergoing constant improvement and is now a national model for aquatic invasive species prevention, according to Ted Thayer, AIS Coordinator for the TRPA.

“By mid-season of this year, boat inspection times were significantly reduced over last year, even though inspectors are decontaminating more boats than ever,” Thayer said. “A full decontamination of boats suspected of carrying aquatic invasive species took on average three days last year over a busy holiday weekend,” Thayer said. “That dropped to an average of three hours over this 4th of July, our busiest weekend of the year.”

The Tahoe Watercraft Inspection program was formed in 2008 to prevent new invasive species from entering Lake Tahoe. Now in its fourth season, boat inspectors are processing 100 percent of all boats entering Lake Tahoe at roadside inspection sites. Last year roadside inspections accounted for 31 percent of all boats inspected, while the balance occurred at boat ramps. Inspectors have completed 1,600 hot-water decontaminations this season while last year the total for the season was 600. By comparison, 621 decontaminations were completed over this year’s 4th of July weekend alone.

Another success for this season is a redesigned web site [www.TahoeBoatInspections.com] that has made it easier for boaters to find information on the inspection program and come to the inspection stations prepared.

“Our message of ‘Clean, Drain, and Dry’ seems to be getting through,” Thayer said. “More boats are arriving ready for quick inspection this year over last. People are taking the time to prepare their boats by cleaning them ahead of time. But it's important that this be done a few days in advance so that the boat is fully dry. If the boat has just been cleaned and drained but is still wet, it will need to be decontaminated.”

Since its formation in 2007, the state, federal and local agencies comprising the Lake Tahoe AIS Coordinating Committee have provided leadership, direction and resources to fulfill the mission of prevention, detection and control of aquatic invasive species in the Lake Tahoe Region. The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency plays a leadership role in this partnership and cooperatively leads the effort to preserve, restore, and enhance the unique natural and human environment of the Lake Tahoe Region now and in the future. For additional information, contact Kristi Boosman at (775) 589-5230 or email to kboosman@trpa.org.