



WGFD

Conserving Wildlife, Serving People

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NEW INITIATIVE TO TARGET AQUATIC INVADERS

Cheyenne--The Wyoming Game and Fish Department has announced a new initiative to hit aquatic invasive species where it counts. In an effort to protect Wyoming's valuable water resources, the state legislature allocated \$1.5 million to the department to implement new programs aimed at preventing the introduction of quagga and zebra mussels to Wyoming waters.

Quagga and zebra mussels can ruin fisheries; clog boat motor cooling systems; foul watercraft hulls and equipment; and clog water delivery systems used for power plants, irrigation and domestic water use. Quagga and zebra mussels are not known to occur in Wyoming but are present in three neighboring states. They can be transported on boats and trailers.

WGFD Director Steve Ferrell says, "The strong message from Wyoming's legislature is that they don't want these destructive aquatic invasive species in our waters. We are very fortunate to have the support and backing from our elected officials so we can proactively take aggressive measures to keep Wyoming clean of quagga and zebra mussels."

Based on direction from the legislature, the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission has implemented emergency regulations to address the aquatic invasive species threat. The legislation gives the commission authority to inspect boats and to prevent the launching of boats suspected of harboring invasive species.

The legislation also directs the commission to establish a new aquatic invasive species watercraft decal program to help fund prevention efforts. Under this program, all watercraft using Wyoming waters will be required to display an annual Aquatic Invasive Species decal (inflatable watercraft 10 feet in length or less are exempt). Costs for the decal under the emergency regulations are \$10 for motorized watercraft registered in Wyoming, \$30 for motorized watercraft registered in other states, \$5 for non-motorized watercraft owned by Wyoming residents and \$15 for non-motorized watercraft owned by nonresidents. Decals will go on sale on the WGFD website on April 15 and at automated license selling agents on May 17.

The Wyoming Game and Fish Commission will consider permanent rule-making for this program in June, following a series of public meetings.

Quagga and zebra mussels originally came from the Black and Caspian seas in Eurasia, and were most likely transported to North America in the bilges of large transport ships. They can be easily spread by recreational boaters when they attach to boat hulls and equipment.

“Quagga and zebra mussels colonize in large, dense clusters, and damage water delivery systems. Once established, they are virtually impossible to eradicate, and the cost to maintain water systems is many times greater than prevention efforts,” says Director Ferrell. “By impeding water delivery systems, we could all end up paying higher costs for the use of water. These mussels have been known to destroy fisheries by removing plankton from the water. If we allow them to infect Wyoming waters, they could remove the primary food source for many of our fish. These mussels caused the lake trout population to decline by 95% over the past 10 years in Lake Ontario. If they were capable of crashing the food chain in a major body of water like Lake Ontario, imagine what they could do in Wyoming’s waters. We will do everything we can to protect and preserve Wyoming’s waters.”

In addition to hiring temporary personnel to inspect boats at priority waters across Wyoming, the WGFD is using the legislatively appropriated money to buy decontamination equipment to treat boats that are found to be harboring mussels or have a strong possibility of harboring mussels. The department will also conduct surveillance to search for the presence of these organisms in Wyoming's waters. In addition, the department is launching an expanded outreach campaign to further educate boaters about the threat of aquatic invasive species and the new decal requirement.

“We are working hard to get this program underway before the boating season starts this spring, and we appreciate the support of the legislature and the public in helping us protect Wyoming's waters,” said Ferrell.

For more information about aquatic invasive species in Wyoming, visit the WGFD website at <http://gf.state.wy.us>.