

# **Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS)**

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **Background**

#### **What are aquatic invasive species (AIS)?**

Aquatic invasive species are non-native organisms that can cause significant harm to an ecosystem when introduced. Aquatic invasive species like quagga mussels and zebra mussels are small organisms that could have huge impacts for Wyoming's waters, boaters, and anglers. They can ruin fisheries, clog cooling systems in motorboats, foul hulls, and ruin equipment.

#### **What is a quagga or zebra mussel?**

Both are closely related, freshwater mollusk species. Other types of mollusks include snails, clams, oysters, and scallops.

#### **What do quagga and zebra mussels look like?**

Quagga and zebra mussels are commonly called 'bivalves,' meaning they have two shells (or valves). Shell color and patterns vary from a dark striped pattern, to a light tan shell with zig-zag stripes, to completely brown or light colored with little striping. These mussels have byssal threads, which allow them to attach to hard surfaces such as boats. Quagga and zebra mussel larvae are microscopic, while adults may be up to two inches long. They are usually found in clusters and may live 4 to 5 years.

#### **Where do quagga and zebra mussels come from?**

These species came to North America from the Black and Caspian Sea drainages in Eurasia.

#### **How did quagga and zebra mussels get to North America?**

These mussels were first discovered in Lake St. Clair, Michigan, in 1988. It is believed they were transported to North America in ballast water of large vessels from Europe. Since becoming established in the Great Lakes, they have primarily been transported downstream through water currents and transported overland on trailered boats.

#### **Are quagga and zebra mussels in Wyoming?**

These organisms have not been documented in Wyoming yet, but are present in several bordering states like Utah and Colorado. You can help protect Wyoming's waters by making sure you don't move a mussel and by supporting efforts to prevent their introduction into Wyoming.

#### **Why are they called "quagga" and "zebra" mussels?**

Both species are sometimes referred to as zebra mussels because they both have light and dark alternating stripes. Quagga mussels are actually a distinct, but similar, species named after an extinct animal related to zebras. Although these species differ slightly in appearance, the concerns with both of these species are the same.

## **What are the potential impacts if quagga and zebra mussels become introduced into Wyoming?**

If you use water or electricity, you do not want invasive mussels introduced into your state's waters. These species can have widespread impacts on power plants, municipalities, irrigation systems, and other water users. They impede water delivery and increase maintenance costs by clogging pipes, pumps, turbines, and filtration systems--costs that are all passed on to the consumer.

Fisheries are destroyed by the presence of these invasive filter-feeding mussels. Quagga and zebra mussels remove plankton from the water. Plankton are the primary food source for forage fish and forage fish are the food of sport fishes. For example, the lake trout population in Lake Ontario has declined by 95 percent in the past 10 years due to a crash in the food chain caused by invasive mussels.

## **What can I do to prevent the introduction of quagga and zebra mussels into Wyoming?**

Boaters should follow these three simple steps before launching or leaving a body of water:

- **DRAIN** all water.
- **CLEAN** all equipment including crevices and other hidden areas.
- **DRY** your watercraft and gear before launching in a new body of water. Dry your watercraft for 5 days in the summer, 18 days in the spring or fall, or 3 days at freezing temperatures.

How else can I help?

You can help by supporting prevention work being carried out by the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, State Parks and Cultural Resources, and other agencies. You can also help by supporting funding initiatives for future prevention efforts.

## **Watercraft Inspection and Decontamination**

### **Is it mandatory to get my watercraft inspected?**

These are two circumstances when it would be mandatory to have your watercraft inspected.

-When an authorized inspector determines an inspection is warranted, then an inspection is required prior to launching the watercraft.

- If your watercraft has been on any water known to be infested with AIS within the last 30 days, then an inspection is required prior to launching the watercraft, unless it has been decontaminated and sealed.

### **What is a watercraft inspection?**

At an AIS check station, an authorized inspector will ask a few questions to determine the risk your watercraft poses of transporting AIS. If the watercraft is deemed low-risk, the watercraft owner will be provided informational materials and allowed to launch. A watercraft deemed high risk will need to undergo a more thorough inspection. High-risk watercraft may include those that last operated their watercraft in a state with waters known to have invasive mussels, or watercraft with a large amount of standing water which could harbor larval mussels.

**Where can I go to get a watercraft inspected?**

Watercraft inspections will be conducted at major waters throughout Wyoming on a rotating basis. Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD) regional offices will also serve as inspection locations as needed. To request an inspection, call 1-877-WGFD-AIS.

**How long will an inspection take?**

A standard inspection will take 3-5 minutes. A high-risk inspection is more thorough and may take 10-30 minutes depending on the type and size of watercraft.

**What can I do to ensure I don't transport AIS and make my inspection quicker?**

Before you launch in Wyoming, make sure you have followed the Drain, Clean, and Dry procedure. This will allow you to quickly move through the inspection process.

Self-check forms will be available at boat ramps, WGFD offices, and on the department's website, which will allow you to perform a self-assessment to determine whether your watercraft may be transporting AIS. By completing this form and presenting it when you encounter an AIS check station, you should be able to launch with minimal delay. At waters without an AIS check station, complete the self-check to ensure you are not transporting AIS, and proceed to launch.

**Do I need to stop at an AIS check station?**

Yes, all persons transporting watercraft shall stop at authorized AIS check stations that are established on their route of travel.

**What happens if my watercraft needs to be decontaminated?**

An authorized inspector will thoroughly spray the exterior and flush the interior compartments with scalding (140°F) water to remove and kill any AIS that may be on the watercraft. After decontamination, the watercraft will be inspected again to ensure the decontamination was successful. Watercraft that are heavily infested with AIS may require a quarantine to kill any AIS that may not have been killed during a decontamination.

**Can I use a car wash to decontaminate my watercraft?**

No. Only an authorized inspector can decontaminate watercraft in Wyoming. In addition, the water used at car washes does not reach the high temperatures needed to kill AIS, and the

effluent may drain into a water and spread any AIS washed from the watercraft. It is best to decontaminate watercraft on a dirt or gravel surface where the effluent water can evaporate.

**Can I disinfect my watercraft using bleach or other chemicals?**

No. Hot water or drying are the only approved decontamination methods in Wyoming. Chemicals, such as bleach, have not been proven to be effective in disinfecting all AIS and may damage your watercraft and equipment.

**Decals**

**What will the AIS decal fees be used for?**

Fees collected for the AIS decals will fund the AIS program in Wyoming. These fees will pay for programs to educate the public about AIS, prevention efforts to keep AIS from being introduced into Wyoming such as watercraft inspections, enforcement, and implementation of AIS regulations.

**Why are only boaters being charged for the AIS decal?**

Watercraft are the primary means that AIS, especially zebra and quagga mussels, are transported and therefore are the greatest risk for spreading AIS to and within Wyoming. We do not yet have any confirmed waters with invasive mussels, but waters could have mussels in them before we can detect them. So, all watercraft present a risk for transporting AIS. It is very important for all boaters, even those only boating in Wyoming, to follow the Drain, Clean, and Dry protocol.

In addition, the Wyoming legislature appropriated \$1.5 million in general fund monies to fund AIS prevention activities in 2010-this money is paid by all Wyoming residents to help protect our waters.

**Where do I place the AIS decal on my watercraft?**

For motorized watercraft, AIS decals shall be displayed on the starboard (right) side of the watercraft, six inches aft (back) of the watercraft registration number. For non-motorized watercraft AIS decals shall be displayed on the starboard (right) side of the bow. All AIS decals shall be displayed in a visible manner while the watercraft is underway.

**Does the AIS decal indicate a watercraft has been inspected?**

No, an AIS decal is not proof a watercraft has been inspected. The AIS decal is a funding mechanism for the AIS program.

**Are AIS decals different colors for motorized versus non-motorized watercraft?**

No, current year AIS decals are the same color as Wyoming watercraft registration decals.

**What is the fee structure for the AIS decals?**

Motorized watercraft registered in Wyoming = \$10 AIS decal

Motorized watercraft registered in any other state = \$30 AIS decal  
Non-motorized watercraft owned by a Wyoming resident = \$5 AIS decal  
Non-motorized watercraft owned by a non-resident = \$15 AIS decal

Inflatable watercraft under 10 feet in length are exempt from the decal requirement.

**Why are inflatable watercraft under 10' exempt from AIS decals?**

These watercraft present a very low risk for transporting AIS because they typically do not hold or transport water, do not have hard surfaces for quagga and zebra mussels to attach to, and are not moored in the water long enough for quagga and zebra mussels to attach.

**Will the AIS decals distinguish between resident and nonresident as well as motorized and non-motorized?**

Yes, each AIS decal will specify if it is for motorized/non-motorized as well as resident/nonresident. These various classifications will be printed on each AIS decal.

**When and where can I get an AIS decal?**

AIS decals will be available starting April 15 on the WGFD website, and will be available beginning May 17 from automated license selling agents across Wyoming. When purchasing the decal, either on the WGFD website or at a license agent, you will be given a receipt that will allow you to launch your watercraft in Wyoming for 10 business days. A permanent decal will be mailed to you within 10 business days.

**What happens if I lose a decal?**

If you lose a decal, you will be required to purchase a new decal. Duplicate decals will not be available.

**How long are AIS decals valid for?**

AIS decals are valid for the calendar year; they will expire on December 31 of year purchased.

**When will I have to have an AIS decal?**

Beginning May 17, 2010, you will be required to have an AIS decal on your watercraft before launching on or entering into Wyoming waters.

**Is it a violation not to have an AIS decal on a watercraft?**

Yes, Wyoming Game and Fish Department Commission regulations require that all watercraft must have an AIS decal, prior to launching on or entering into the waters of the State. Watercraft which are inflatable and less than 10 feet in length are exempt from the AIS decal provision.

**When a watercraft with a current AIS decal changes ownership, does the new owner need to buy another AIS decal?**

No, the AIS decal remains attached to the watercraft and is valid for the remainder of the calendar year.

**Do I need an AIS decal to boat waters within the boundaries of Yellowstone National Park or the Wind River Reservation?**

No, you will not need an AIS decal to boat on these waters. The State of Wyoming does not have watercraft jurisdiction in these areas. Please contact the appropriate authority for rules and regulations pertaining to waters with the boundaries of Yellowstone National Park or the Wind River Reservation.

**Do I need an AIS decal to boat in waters which cross state boundaries with Wyoming, such as Flaming Gorge, Big Horn Lake, Palisades Reservoir, and the North Platte River?**

Yes, once you enter the waters of Wyoming you need to have purchased an AIS decal. All applicable Wyoming AIS rules and regulations apply. For instance, if you launch your watercraft in another state and boat into Wyoming, you will need to have a Wyoming AIS decal affixed to your watercraft.

**Do I need an AIS decal for a sailboard, inflatable trampoline, or other water sport toy?**

No, water sport toys are exempt from the Wyoming AIS decal requirement. Water sport toys are defined as, “a sailboard, float tube, kite board or any aid to swimming or fishing that is not designed primarily for navigation.”