

State launches all-out attack on invasive zebra mussels

Last month, a coalition of natural resource agencies and tribes held a virtual "what if" exercise on the possibility of invasive quagga or zebra mussels being found in the Columbia River Basin.

The practice scenario involved a boat launching into Lake Billy Chinook after coming to the lake from mussel-infested Lake Pleasant, Ariz.

The out-of-state boat launched and moored in a marina on the lake for 10 hours before the invasive mussels were detected.

The exercise included monitoring and containment op-



Zebra mussels cling to the underside of a boat.

tions ranging from facility closures, law enforcement assistance, and mandatory boat inspection/decontamination for boats leaving the water body.

"Oregon needs to practice a rapid response plan and act fast," said Glenn Dolphin, aquatic invasive species coordinator for Oregon State Marine Board. "The question isn't *if* the mussels contaminate the basin, but *when*."

The state needs to be prepared with technology and communication, with leadership and procedures in place, he said.

Invasive species can decimate an area, crowding out native species and damaging water filtration systems.

In the mock drill, the re-

sponse team activated a mock command center and explored the best mitigation options for the conditions.

The variety of participants provided a diverse amount of expertise for the drill, said Rick Boatner, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's invasive species/wildlife integrity supervisor.

"If you miss your window of opportunity for whatever reason, the mussels will take over an entire ecosystem," Boatner said. "And now you are dealing with containment and control, which is far more expensive and drastically increases the chance that the mussel will expand into more areas around the state."

Mandatory boat inspection stations in Oregon are the first line of defense, but most are open seasonally and only during daytime hours. Recreational boaters can help protect waterways by cleaning, draining and drying their boats after every use.

Beginning this year, all boaters also are required to "pull the plug" and empty any water-holding compartments when leaving a water body and during transit. Nonmotorized boats 10 feet and longer are required to purchase and carry a waterway access permit. Nonresident motorboat owners must purchase an out-of-state aquatic invasive species permit.

The revenue pays for aquatic invasive species inspection stations, decontamination equipment, staffing, law enforcement, and outreach materials.

Those participating in the exercise were Oregon State Marine Board, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, Oregon Department of Agriculture, Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, Portland General Electric, Invasive Species Action Network and the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission.

"We are proud to be a part of this ... proactive approach to invasive species prevention in the Columbia River Basin," said Theresa Thom, regional aquatic invasive species coordinator for Fish and Wildlife. "Our successes and lessons learned are being used to inform other rapid-response efforts across the nation."

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