

Boaters cooperative in inspection program, state officials say

No mussels found in Wyoming's boat decontamination effort

Casper Star-Tribune | Posted: Friday, July 2, 2010

CASPER — Wyoming Game and Fish Department workers have inspected nearly 8,000 boats for invasive zebra and quagga mussels since the agency began inspections May 23.

Game and Fish officials said the vast majority of boaters encountered have been cooperative and seem to be willing to do what they can to keep Wyoming waters free of the mussel species.

In February, Game and Fish unveiled an aggressive campaign to keep the two tiny, prolific mussel species out of Wyoming's lakes and reservoirs. The non-native mussels are about the size of a fingernail and attach to anything underwater, including boats, motors, docks, pipes and other structures. Once introduced, the species is difficult and costly to eradicate, biologists say.

Game and Fish managers said just six of the approximately 8,000 inspected boats were decontaminated for mussels after being inspected.

Only two of the boats have been found to contain mussels, both in the Jackson area, said Game and Fish aquatic invasive species program coordinator Beth Bear.

Bear said that even though the mussels were dead, both boats were also decontaminated as a precaution. "Most boaters are getting the message and doing what they can to help," she said.

Jackson area fisheries supervisor Rob Gipson said in a media release that both boats had come from Nevada's Lake Mead, a body of water known to be infested with both zebra and quagga mussels.

"The boaters didn't do anything wrong ... in fact, they did everything right," Gipson said.

"They voluntarily waited through the 30-day drying period with their boats out of the water, and (they) wanted to get their boats inspected and decontaminated," he said.

Under Game and Fish regulations, if a boat has been in a known infected water within the past 30 days, it is required to be inspected before launching in any Wyoming waters.

The agency recently released a draft state management plan for public review that aims to deal with the threat of the mussel species on a more permanent basis.

Wyoming lawmakers allocated \$1.5 million in February to fund preventive efforts as part of a new law that also gave the agency the authority to inspect and prevent the launching of any watercraft suspected of harboring mussels.

As part of the effort, watercraft users in Wyoming are now required to purchase and display an aquatic-invasive-species decal before launching watercraft in the state. All fees collected from the decal sales go to help fund the inspection, education and other preventive efforts.

Bear said agency inspectors are gearing up in anticipation of thousands of boats hitting Wyoming waters over the July 4 weekend, which is expected to be the busiest boating weekend of the year.

Bear said as of Monday, more than 20,000 decals have been sold, which represents about 56 percent of all the registered watercraft in Wyoming.