

Game and Fish holds public meetings to clear up confusion over new regs

## Mussel inspections determined by risk

By JEFF GEARINO - Southwest Wyoming bureau | Posted: Monday, April 26, 2010

GREEN RIVER -- Authorized inspectors will determine when the inspection of a boat is warranted this summer as part of the Wyoming Game and Fish Department's effort to prevent the transport of aquatic invasive species into state waters.

Game and Fish personnel will key on high-risk boats for inspections agency officials said late last week.

Boat inspections will be mandatory if the watercraft has been known to be in mussel-infected waters 30 days prior to launching, unless the craft has been decontaminated and sealed.

The department's authorized inspectors will make the final determination of when a boat inspection is warranted prior to launch, officials said.

Last month -- under a new Wyoming law -- the agency implemented emergency regulations in an effort to control the tiny, prolific mussels from invading Wyoming waters.

Game and Fish officials said some boaters have been confused by the new regulations since they were announced last month.

The emergency regulations are part of an aggressive, proactive campaign to prevent the introduction of aquatic invasive species into the state, such as zebra and quagga mussels.

The mussels are not known to be in Wyoming, but are present in some waters in neighboring Colorado, Utah and Nebraska.

Officials say once introduced, the mussels can be deadly to fisheries and costly to manage.

The new law gives the Game and Fish the authority to inspect boats and prevent the launching of any boat suspected of harboring the two mussel species.

It also requires boaters to purchase an aquatic invasive species decal before launching watercraft in state waters.

Agency officials met with state residents last week and another meeting will be held Tuesday in Casper to gather public input on the rule. The Game and Fish Commission will decide whether to make those regulations permanent during a meeting June 17.

### Rotating basis

Game and Fish spokesman Eric Keszler said the agency has received many questions about the requirement to have watercraft inspected.

He said watercraft inspections will be conducted on major waters, lakes and reservoirs throughout Wyoming on a rotating basis.

Game and Fish regional offices will also serve as inspection locations as needed.

Keszler said there are several circumstances when it would be mandatory to have watercraft inspected.

If the watercraft has been on any water known to be infected with zebra or quagga mussels within the last 30 days, an inspection is required prior to launching unless the boat has been decontaminated and sealed. Boats with large amounts of standing water will also be looked at.

People wanting inspection of their boats prior to launching can call 1-877-WGFD-AIS. A standard inspection should take no more than 3 to 5 minutes.

Kezsler said a high-risk inspection is more thorough and may take 10 to 30 minutes, depending on the type and size of watercraft.

At the mussel check stations, an inspector will ask a few questions to determine the risk the watercraft poses for possibly transporting the species. Keszler said if the watercraft is deemed low risk, the owner will be provided informational materials and allowed to launch.

Boats deemed high risk will be inspected thoroughly.

He said watercraft in the high risk category may include those that last operated their watercraft in a state where waters are known to have invasive mussels, or watercraft with a large amount of standing water, which could harbor the mussels.

To help speed up the inspection process, boaters should follow the agency's Drain, Clean and Dry procedures, he said.

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If you go

The Wyoming Game and Fish Commission is taking public comment on the possible adoption of permanent rules to address the threat of aquatic invasive species such as zebra and quagga mussels. A meeting will be held at 7 p.m. Tuesday in the Casper regional office.