



NPS ADOPTS NEW STRATEGY TO STOP SPREAD OF LAKE POWELL MUSSELS TO OTHER LAKES, RIVERS THROUGHOUT WEST

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Officials at the National Park Service's Glen Canyon National Recreation Area announced late last week that it has developed a strategy to help reduce the spread of invasive quagga mussels from Colorado River's Lake Powell to other lakes and rivers with an emphasis on inspections of boats leaving the reservoir.

"Now that the quagga mussels are in Lake Powell, we need to focus our efforts on containing them," said Glen Canyon NRA Superintendent Todd Brindle. "We all put up a good fight for 14 years to keep Lake Powell mussel free, but now we need to work just as hard to protect other lakes and rivers."

The Glen Canyon National Recreation Area quagga mussel program has shifted from prevention (trying to keep the mussels out) to containment (trying to keep the mussels from spreading to other bodies of water), according to the National Park Service. The Colorado River runs down through the recreation area from southern Utah into northern Arizona. It includes Lake Powell, a reservoir backed up by the Glen Canyon Dam.

The news was pleasing, but not totally satisfying, for officials in the Pacific Northwest who are working hard to fend off the epidemic spread of invasive quagga and zebra mussels.

No infestations have been reported in Idaho, Montana, Oregon or Washington to-date, but the harmful mollusks are knocking at the door. Boat inspections that began in late winter near Idaho's southern border discovered in early March a mussel-contaminated boat that was headed north from Lake Powell.

Idaho watercraft inspectors are looking for high-risk boats that have been in quagga- and zebra-mussel impacted waters such as Lake Powell, Lake Mead, Lake Havasu and Lake Pleasant.

Zebra and quagga mussels are native to the Black and Caspian Seas and were introduced to North America's Great Lakes in ballast water from Russia in the late 1980s.

They were first detected in the western United States in January 2007 in the Lake Mead National Recreation Area. They have since spread throughout the Colorado River system and are now found in several other western states. Fast-growing populations of zebra/quagga mussels threaten local environments and infrastructure such as dams and irrigation facilities.

"It's a smart move on their part," Idaho state Rep. Eric Anderson said of the newly announced Glen Canyon strategy. But a greater urgency is needed, particularly in Congress and within the Department of the Interior, to provide funds and enforcement authority to prevent the spread of mussels, which the state lawmaker says should be treated with the same vigilance accorded "mad cow disease."

"The federal government needs to protect us... they need to be a partner in this," Anderson

said. The infested areas nearest the Northwest are to considerable degree on federal lands.

The state lawmaker has taken up quagga invasion prevention as a personal crusade. The Priest Lake resident says he'll retire from the legislature this November to devote more time to the cause.

"I need the time to really work this thing, lobby the congressional delegation," as well as the Department of Interior, Anderson said.

Jim Yost, one of two Idaho representatives of the Northwest Power and Conservation Council, has been centrally involved in Northwest efforts encouraging the screening of boats headed north from Lake Powell, Lake Havasu and heavily infested Lake Mead. The Council, with representatives from Idaho, Montana, Oregon and Washington, is charged by federal law with assuring the Northwest region with a reliable water supply and helping protect and enhance fish and wildlife affected by the Columbia River basin's hydro system. Invasive mussel could threaten both of those missions.

"We need inspections and decontaminations before the boats leave and go somewhere else," Yost said of infested areas in the Southwest.

"But part of it is that they don't have a lot of authority to do that," he said of the Park Service's ability to require inspections for outgoing watercraft.

Yost did say he was encouraged by the Glen Canyon NRA decision to "start shifting their emphasis to inspection of outbound boats.

He also said that the NPS is "doing a better job" at least of notifying other states about potentially contaminated boats that might be heading north.

"We're saying you've got to do a better job on this," the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission's Stephen Phillips said of federal involvement. Phillips is the PSMFC's Aquatic Invasive Species Prevention Program manager. The PSMFC is an interstate compact agency that helps resource agencies and the fishing industry sustainably manage valuable Pacific Ocean resources in a five-state region. Member states include California, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and Alaska.

The PSMFC's invasive species web page can be found at
: www.aquaticnuisance.org

As a result the newly adopted strategy, Glen Canyon boat ramp hours will no longer be restricted and green mussel free certificates no longer required. NPS staff will focus on checking for evidence of attached mussels on boats entering and leaving the lake. Rangers on the ramps, at the marinas, and along beaches will educate visitors on how to stop the spread of mussels with "clean, drain, and dry techniques.

Utah and Arizona have designated the entirety of Lake Powell as infested/affected by invasive quagga mussels and their state laws require that boat owners decontaminate their vessels and conveyances to avoid the transport of quagga mussels to uninfested waters. Specific information on state laws for Utah can be found at www.wildlife.utah.gov/mussels or for Arizona at www.azgfd.gov/ais.

The National Park Service operates under proprietary jurisdiction at Glen Canyon and has no jurisdictional authority to enforce state laws regarding containment (exiting watercraft) of

quagga mussels at Lake Powell, according to information posted on the Glen Canyon NRA web site. State officers retain full authority to enforce state laws within Glen Canyon National Recreation Area boundaries.

For additional information, visit our website at <http://www.nps.gov/glca/naturescience/mussel-update.htm>

Glen Canyon National Recreation Area does not have the infrastructure or the resources to use the few existing NPS decontamination stations for the hundreds of thousands of watercraft using Lake Powell, the NPS says. For this 2014 boating season, Glen Canyon will offer decontamination services for any non-agency-controlled vessels (other than concessioner, contractor, permittee) observed entering or exiting the park with confirmed visible (or detectable) attached quagga mussels or other aquatic invasive species (AIS).

The NPS will encourage the states or private businesses to develop permanent decontamination stations outside the park to serve watercraft using Lake Powell.

Glen Canyon will require agency controlled watercraft (concessioner, contractor, permittee) to be inspected and if necessary decontaminated, in accordance with Utah and Arizona state laws and will provide information about applicable state rules. This requirement will apply to agency controlled watercraft upon exit from Lake Powell for transport to other waters. This will be managed as a concessioner, contractor, and permittee responsibility as law and policy allow. All slipped and moored boats, the most likely vector of spread of adult mussels, are covered by this provision.

The Glen Canyon NRA is encouraging public cooperation regarding boat inspections, but cannot require inspections within the NRA boundaries.

“When it comes to [boats] leaving, our authority gets pretty thin,” said Glen Canyon NRA ecologist/biologist Mark Anderson.

Glen Canyon National Recreation Area has received a targeted annual base operational budget of \$750,000 for quagga and zebra mussel containment, prevention, and enforcement beginning FY14.

Glen Canyon will utilize the new funds to hire and support 20-plus NPS aquatic invasive species staff (primarily seasonal) to meet quagga mussel containment goals through an extensive visitor education effort at park launch ramps, marinas, and in local communities, as well as online and through public events. The new funds will also be used to continue to monitor the distribution and abundance of quagga mussels in Lake Powell and to support early detection of other aquatic invasive species.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the state of Utah have provided supplemental funds to help support the NPS quagga mussel program, the NPS says.

“It’s a step ahead. It’s a much larger investment... more people,” Mark Anderson said.

“It’s our top priority at this point,” he said. “We think we’ve come up with a good strategy.”



