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GOVERNOR

## OPINION

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# **INVASIVE SPECIES EFFORT IS PAYING OFF AND WILL CONTINUE WITH EVERYONE'S HELP**

*By Governor C.L. "Butch" Otter*

Idaho is taking important steps to protect our natural resources from the threat of invasive species, including quagga mussels and zebra mussels. The Idaho Invasive Species Act of 2008 advanced our effort to prohibit introduction of such invasive species, which can do irreversible and costly damage to our water, land and wildlife habitat.

Think of quagga mussels and zebra mussels as our version of the pythons that are taking over Florida's Everglades, or the snakehead fish in the Potomac River. Rather than waiting for what some folks said was the inevitable advance of these tiny sharp-shelled mollusks – which are wreaking havoc in several other western states – we chose to be proactive and aggressive in defending our precious resources.

In Idaho, the State Department of Agriculture is primarily responsible for defending against such threats. This year it launched the most comprehensive campaign yet, using revenue from the sale of Invasive Species Fund stickers for watercraft to implement an inspection program targeting boats entering Idaho from other states. That same fund helped the department inform the public, beef up existing monitoring efforts statewide and purchase watercraft decontamination equipment.

Quagga mussels and zebra mussels can quickly encrust surfaces and cause severe economic and environmental harm. If they spread to the Pacific Northwest, the threats to hydropower, irrigated agriculture, drinking water, recreation and salmon recovery will be immeasurable. The invasive mussels were first found in the West in 2007, and already Idaho is one of only eight states in the West that is not affected.

They have spread throughout the lower Colorado River system and major water distribution systems. They now infest waterbodies in Nevada, California, Arizona, Colorado, Texas and Utah. In these tough economic times, local, state and federal agencies are being forced to launch multimillion-dollar control and mitigation programs to protect vital hydropower and water delivery infrastructure.

Unfortunately, we know that we cannot protect Idaho by our own efforts alone. When I realized that boats were leaving infested waters managed by the federal government without proper decontamination, I wrote to Interior Secretary Salazar to ask for help. As I told him, it is unacceptable that states like Idaho should have to continue bearing the burden of protecting our waters from this known and – with determined and coordinated actions – preventable danger.

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The Idaho State Department of Agriculture's watercraft check stations this summer were located where there was the highest likelihood of intercepting boats crossing into Idaho from states known to have infested water bodies. Crews were equipped to decontaminate boats on the spot if they were considered at high risk of being infested. Several boats were decontaminated and two mussel-fouled boats were found before the check stations closed for the season.

They will reopen in the spring. But in the meantime, make no mistake: We must remain vigilant against this incredibly serious threat, and we can't do it alone. We can't be everywhere all the time. This effort will require everyone who cares about Idaho's water and other resources to participate.

Please take the time to clean, drain, and dry your boats every time you take them out of the water. Let's assert some "mussel control," and keep Idaho what America was meant to be.

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(532 words)