



WGFD

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News Release

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QUICK ACTION PREVENTS POTENTIAL MUSSEL INFESTATION

GREEN RIVER— Thanks to a conscientious boater, an alert boat mechanic and the protocol set up by the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR) Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) Task Force, wildlife officials were able to prevent a boat from launching in Flaming Gorge Reservoir with an aquatic hitchhiker on board: a zebra mussel.

On Tuesday, April 28, a local man set out to launch his new boat on Flaming Gorge Reservoir. The boat, a 40' Sea Ray, was purchased and transported a few days ago from a marina at Lake of the Ozarks in Missouri. Fortunately, the new owner from Rock Springs was aware of the AIS threat and he asked the boat mechanic at Buckboard Marina to inspect his boat for mussels, just in case. The mechanic located one zebra mussel on the watercraft trim tabs. The mechanic immediately called Utah's AIS Hotline and, as luck would have it, an AIS Technician was at Buckboard Marina.

“I knew there was a reason why I decided to drive into Wyoming today,” said Mike Warden, Utah AIS Technician. “What are the odds of me being at Buckboard Marina when one of these mussels is discovered? I monitor boat launches up and down this side of the Gorge looking for aquatic invasive species, like the zebra and quagga mussels. Some days I wait for hours without checking a single boat. Now, today, we check a boat with one of the culprits and stop an accidental introduction of the mussel. This just makes all of the time and money we expend on this program worth it.”

Officials with UDWR and the Wyoming Game & Fish Department responded to the AIS report. Utah AIS Technicians Mike Warden and McKenzie Breitenbach decontaminated the boat with a power washer, spraying the boat with water heated to 180 degrees F in order to kill any invasive mussels on the outside of the large watercraft. Utah AIS Supervisor Natalie Muth completed the boat decontamination process. The owner of the boat voluntarily agreed to a 5-day quarantine.

Green River Wildlife Supervisor Steve DeCecco said, fortunately, regional fisheries biologists and a wildlife technician were gill netting on the Flaming Gorge Reservoir when the report came in.

“We responded to the reservoir, assisted with a complete AIS inspection and waited for the decontamination unit to arrive from Dutch John, Utah,” DeCecco said. “We 'dodged the mussel' on this one, due to a very responsible citizen, an aware marina staff and having the Utah people there

to handle the inspection and decontamination. I believe we all learned from the incident and we will be better able to partner with Utah on boat checks, AIS outreach efforts and improve coordination with their AIS people.”

“We’re fortunate that the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources personnel were able to respond and assist with this situation,” said Mike Stone, WGFD Chief of Fisheries. “Wyoming currently has very few resources available to rapidly respond to aquatic invasive species incidents.”

Zebra and quagga mussels are freshwater, bivalve mollusks that typically have a dark and white pattern on their shells, hence the name Zebra. They are non-native species, invading North America from the Black, Aral and Caspian Seas sometime in the mid 1980s. They are considered nuisance or invasive species throughout the country. These species have had tremendous impacts to water bodies, recreation and even drinking water supplies in other states, including several states that border Wyoming. They have not yet been discovered in any of Wyoming’s waters.

Heavy infestations of these species can alter aquatic environments by reducing food sources for game fish. They can clog water intakes on motors, overheating and ruining boat engines. Aquatic invasive species can increase the operating costs of drinking water plants, power plants, dam maintenance and industrial processes.

Game and Fish is working with other state and federal agencies and partner organizations to minimize the risk of invasive species reaching Wyoming. The department has launched an AIS outreach campaign and held a series of open houses in April to educate water users and update the public regarding partnerships and efforts on aquatic invasive species.

The Wyoming legislature’s Travel, Recreation, Wildlife and Cultural Resources Committee is considering aquatic invasive species issues as one of its current interim study topics.

Research and documentation in other states that have experienced these mussel infestations confirm prevention efforts, including outreach, remain the best defense against these aquatic invasive species.

Anglers, boaters and other recreationists are asked to help prevent the spread of these organisms between bodies of water. Before leaving a body of water, but while on dry land, do the following: **Drain** every conceivable space that can hold water, including engines, live wells or ballast tanks or even just the inside of your canoe, kayak or raft. **Clean** any and all equipment by removing plants, mud and other debris. Allow all equipment to thoroughly **Dry** before launching in another body of water.

For more information, visit the Game and Fish AIS Web site at <http://gf.state.wy.us/fish/AIS/index.asp> or call (307) 777-4600