



make a clear difference for Flathead Lake

# Aquatic Invasive Species Program

Summary from the 6/20/12 Flathead Basin Water Quality Meeting with Flathead Basin Legislators & Candidates. Sponsored by Flathead Lakers, Flathead Basin Commission and Lake County

## BACKGROUND

Flathead Lake and other Montana waters are threatened by aquatic invasive species (AIS) like zebra and quagga mussels and Eurasian watermilfoil. Invasive species have few natural predators or control agents, which allow them to reproduce and grow rapidly. They threaten traditional uses of lakes and rivers for agriculture, domestic water supplies, power production and recreation, and can incur enormous mitigation and management costs. The most common way AIS are spread is on boats being transported from an infested water body. If accidentally introduced here, many species would be impossible to eradicate.



Invasive mussels on boat propeller.  
National Park Service Photo

## STATE AIS PROGRAM SOLUTIONS

### Need for oversight and greater coordination among agencies:

Several state agencies play a role in dealing with AIS, each with its own priorities and responsibilities. At times this leads to inefficiency and delays in AIS prevention and rapid response. Solutions include establishing:

- an independent coordinator of all state AIS efforts in the governor's office; and/or
- an independent oversight council to provide overall program direction and interagency coordination (which could be established with a sunset date and the opportunity for renewal).

### Funding needs:

Current funding is not sufficient to protect Montana's valuable waters from AIS. Prevention is far less costly than mitigation, containment, and management. Several options exist for funding sources and a combination of two or more may be required:

- boat fees;
- general fund / Governor's base budget;
- local fees / creation of a water quality or AIS district;
- state Emergency Response Fund; and
- AIS Trust Fund.

# CLEAN WATER TOOL KIT: Aquatic Invasive Species Program

## Possible amendments to existing legislation:

- *Boat inspection stations:* Inspecting boats entering the state for AIS is the most effective way to prevent introductions. Strengthening current laws would increase protection, including requirements to ensure that:
  - all boats entering the state be inspected for AIS prior to launching in Montana waters;
  - boat inspection stations are fully operational at all major points of entry into the state;
  - the Montana Dept. of Transportation inspects all commercially hauled boats at ports of entry and establishes a protocol for notification of other management agencies, and
  - both Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks and Montana Department of Agriculture have the same authority for establishing and managing inspection stations.
- *Quarantine authority:* It is currently illegal to transport aquatic invasive species. But agencies at the state and local level need additional authority to hold boats infested with AIS, including authority to:
  - quarantine fouled boats, and
  - quarantine water bodies on an emergency basis (without requiring designation of a management area).
- *Treatment of Aquatic Invasive Plants:* Overlapping and confusing jurisdictional authority has hampered the ability to rapidly respond to the discovery of new aquatic invasive plants. Such delays pose a risk to our economic well-being, since the opportunity for eradication of aquatic invasive plants is often time limited. Therefore, clarification of existing law is needed to provide authority for:
  - Montana Department of Agriculture to treat aquatic invasive plants; and
  - relevant agencies to use state funding to treat, as appropriate, listed aquatic invasive plants – not just Eurasian watermilfoil.

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## LOCAL AIS PROGRAM SOLUTIONS

Improving cooperation with local and tribal governments and stakeholders can expand the state AIS prevention and rapid response programs to provide greater protection for Montana waters.

### Allow local entities to play a greater role at the local level:

- Expressly permit delegation of AIS authority to willing partners via MOUs or MOAs; and
- Provide opportunities for state AIS funding to be allocated to local partnerships, entities, or state regional offices.

Ensure continued state funding to support priority highway boat inspection stations (e.g., Ronan station protecting Flathead Lake).

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**Together, we can prevent AIS introduction into Flathead Lake!** Help educate boaters or become a Volunteer Boat Inspector. Training available. **Call 883-1341.**

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