

RECREATIONAL BOATERS OF CALIFORNIA

POSITION PAPER - AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES

March 5, 2008

RBOC recognizes the seriousness of the serious threats that aquatic invasive species, including quagga mussels and zebra mussels, pose to California waterways. We understand the need to take aggressive action to prevent the introduction or spread of aquatic invasive species, which cause harm to fisheries and ecosystems and damage boats and boating equipment. As boaters, we advocate for clean waterways and healthy fisheries as essential to recreational pursuits as well as the livelihoods of many individuals and businesses.

We strongly urge that state, regional and local governmental entities resist calls to close waterways. Outright, immediate and potentially permanent boating bans on waterways would have a tremendous negative impact on key stakeholders and the surrounding community.

Closures deplete revenue sources and have substantial financial impacts on local tackle shops, gas stations, hotels and restaurants that depend on the boaters and anglers. A closure would mean the end of many tournament businesses, and it would put an unneeded economic strain on surrounding boat dealers, marine retailers and ancillary industries.

I. COOPERATIVE APPROACH

RBOC urges the adoption of less restrictive alternatives, including cooperative approaches for boat inspection and cleaning, and pre-entry watercraft inspection.

The California Science Advisory Panel ("Advisory Panel"), in its May 2007 recommendations to the California Incident Command (CIP), proposed a series of measures which could help prevent, contain and eradicate the quagga mussel from California water bodies. At no point in its report does the Advisory Panel recommend closures for lakes that have not been infested. On the contrary, the Advisory Panel recommends for un-infested "destination waters" in California, that state and local governmental agencies, lake operators, and users work cooperatively to ensure that boats are inspected and cleaned prior to entry. The recommendation comports with the Water Board's current approach of pre-entry watercraft inspection.

A.B. 1683 [Chapter 419, Statutes of 2007] provides a leadership role for the Department of Fish and Game (DFG) which can be valuable in developing a monitoring plan, establishing a plan to avoid contamination and, if an infestation does occur, an approved plan to address it in a scientifically sound manner with the specific required elements included in Section 2301(d) of the Fish and Game Code of California. Any person who violates Section 2301 or who interferes with its implementation is subject to enforcement under the law. It is critical to the success of any invasive species eradication effort that all relevant parties work in concert to implement scientifically sound measures with an eye toward ensuring that the public is not unnecessarily burdened.

2. Alternatives to Closures

In lieu of closures, we respectfully recommend a number of viable actions.

The California Aquatic Invasive Species Management Plan should be fully implemented. The Incident Command System (ICS), developed to provide state and local agency coordination, should be fully reconstituted and enhanced with the selection of a lead agency. The State of California should expand 24/7 border cross inspections of trailered boats coming into the state. We encourage the state legislature and Governor to fully fund a systematic, comprehensive response to the risk of aquatic invasive species sooner rather than later. It would be inequitable and counterproductive to impose punitive measures on the boating and angling public because of an inadequate state response.

Other components of a management plan should include robust watercraft inspection protocols. We encourage the partnering of state and federal agencies with extensive institutional and operational experience to train personnel as well as volunteers who use the waterway to work cooperatively and proactively to protect our waterways from an infestation.

Comprehensive, systematic and routine water quality monitoring should be tailored to aquatic invasive species. This should include deploying divers to ensure that these species are not present and to initiate rapid response measures when they are discovered.

Additional measures include boat wash down stations and an effective education campaign with non-governmental organizations to reach the broad boating and angling public.

Clearly, there are other, less restrictive alternatives than barring boaters and anglers from a waterway that can be used to mitigate the threat of an aquatic invasive species infestation. A closure should be the option of last resort, not the first.

Preservation of access to waterways, coupled with measured actions sufficient to protect this important resource, would generate substantial goodwill among its stakeholders.

3. COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION & EDUCATION

Local, state and national recreational angling and boating groups, including RBOC, stand ready to assist efforts to prevent an invasion of aquatic invasive species.

RBOC is working to educate boaters and anglers so that they can avoid becoming an unwitting vector of an aquatic invasive species. Our organization is urging boaters to follow the action plan developed by the California Resources Agency - which includes the Department of Boating and Waterways and the Department of Fish and Game - by taking the following steps to inhibit the spread of mussels when leaving the water:

- Inspect all exposed surfaces - small mussels feel like sandpaper to the touch
- Wash the hull of each watercraft thoroughly, preferably with high pressure/hot water
- Remove all plants and animal material
- Drain all water and dry all areas
- Drain and dry the lower outboard unit
- Clean and dry all live-wells
- Empty and dry any buckets
- Dispose of all bait in the trash
- Wait five days and keep watercraft dry between launches into different fresh waters

We encourage state and regional governments to work with the effected stakeholders on both a short- and long-term educational initiatives.

4. CONCLUSION

RBOC understands the sense of urgency to address aquatic invasive species, which are a very real threat and can cause significant environmental, recreational and economic impacts once they become established in a body of water. It is in the best interests of all stakeholders to be pro-active and persistent. We encourage the pursuit of the approaches the state has established to combat and prevent infestations.

Recreational Boaters of California [RBOC] is the nonprofit governmental advocacy organization that works to protect and enhance the interests of the state's recreational boaters before the legislative and executive branches of state and local government.

RBOC is celebrating its 4^{0th} anniversary as a statewide organization which since 1968 has continued its commitment to promoting the enjoyment, protection, and responsible use of our waterways.

5. CONTACT INFORMATION

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