Oregon's Aquatic Invasive Species Prevention Program 2025 Legislative Report

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Executive Summary

In 2009, the Oregon Legislature passed House Bill 2220 that created the Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) Prevention Program and established a new user fee for boaters (AIS Prevention Permit), which funds the AIS Prevention Program. The discovery of quagga mussel veligers in the Snake River below Twin Falls, Idaho for three consecutive years (2023-2025) emphasizes the importance of the AIS Prevention Program. Additionally, the continued spread of golden mussels in the Sacramento River Delta and the connected California State Water Project further underlines the need to protect Oregon's waters from the introduction of aquatic invasive species and limit the spread of existing aquatic invasive species through the AIS prevention program. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) and Oregon State Marine Board (OSMB) are partners in managing the AIS Prevention Program. Watercraft inspection staff activities are managed by ODFW while administration of the AIS Prevention Permit and law enforcement coordination are managed by OSMB.

ODFW operated five watercraft inspection stations located near Oregon's southern, eastern, and northern borders. Ashland and Ontario watercraft inspection stations operate year-round. The seasonal stations in Klamath Falls and Brookings opened the first week of May while the Umatilla station opened in mid-June due to staffing issues. All three seasonal stations remained open until the first week of October. The two-person roving team based previously based in Salem were relocated to the permanent stations to assist with inspections and conduct AIS outreach and education activities on a more local scale.

In 2025 a pilot station was opened on the main access road to the Owyhee Reservoir near Ontario. The Owyhee Reservoir is one of Oregon's highest risk waterbodies for the introduction and establishment of invasive freshwater mussels. This risk is further exacerbated by its proximity to the quagga mussel infestation in the Middle Snake River near Twin Falls, ID. This inspection station was positioned so that, when operated, all watercraft entering the reservoir on the main access road would be inspected for AIS prior to entry.

Across all stations, all motorized and non-motorized watercraft (canoes, kayaks, rafts, etc.) regardless of size are required to stop at inspection stations. In 2025 crews conducted 21,136 watercraft inspections. These inspections resulted in 288 watercraft being decontaminated for aquatic vegetation, two ballast flushes due to high-risk unverifiable water present in the hull, and ten full decontaminations for the presence of invasive freshwater mussels.

In the 2025 fiscal year, revenue generated from AIS Prevention Permit sales totaled $827,362. The AIS Prevention Program provided (either partial or full) funding for seven full-time positions, and ten seasonal or part-time positions. Additionally, these funds supported law enforcement activities such as checking boaters for a current AIS or the Waterway Access Permit and enforcing mandatory stops at watercraft inspection stations.

The program received additional funding from the US Army Corps of Engineers as part of the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA). This grant provided $616,352 over 18 months and was used to help fund additional inspectors and hours of operation at the inspection stations.

Background

In response to the growing threat of an infestation from dreissenid mussels, the 2009 Oregon Legislature approved an AIS Prevention Program. A new user fee (AIS Prevention Permit) was established for owners of non-motorized watercraft ≥10 feet in length and motorized watercraft. Funds generated from the AIS Prevention Permit are used to fund ODFW and OSMB staff,

ODFW watercraft inspectors and supplies, outreach and education materials, and other AIS related activities. For more detailed information about the AIS Prevention Program, please refer to www.odfw.com or www.oregon.gov/OSMB.

The goal of the AIS Prevention Program is to prevent new introductions of aquatic invasive species and limit the spread of existing ones. Invasive freshwater mussels (golden mussels (*Limnoperna fortune),* quagga mussels *(Dreissena bugensis),* and zebra mussels *(Dreissena polymorpha*) and hydrilla (*Hydrilla verticillata*) are among the top species of concern, due to their destructive nature and ease of translocation by watercraft. Invasive freshwater mussel populations have spread rapidly in the United States (Figure 1) due their adaptability, lack of natural predators and ease of physical transport.

In October of 2024 the California Department of Fish and Wildlife announced the confirmed discovery of golden mussels in the Sacramento River Delta (Figure 1, Red-X). This is the first time that this species of mussel, that is native to China and Southeast Asia, has been detected in North America. Golden mussels are a close relative to quagga and zebra mussels, and their destructive environmental and biofouling impacts are similar. Golden mussels have a significant invasion history in locations such as Japan, Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina. The proximity and relatively wide environmental tolerance of this species poses a significant threat to Oregon's waterways and further highlights the need for AIS prevention measures in Oregon.

Species like Eurasian watermilfoil (*Myriophyllum spicatum*) and New Zealand mudsnails *(Potamopyrgus antipodarum)* already contaminate some Oregon waterbodies. For more information about these and other aquatic invasive species, please visit: USGS Non-Indigenous Aquatic Species.

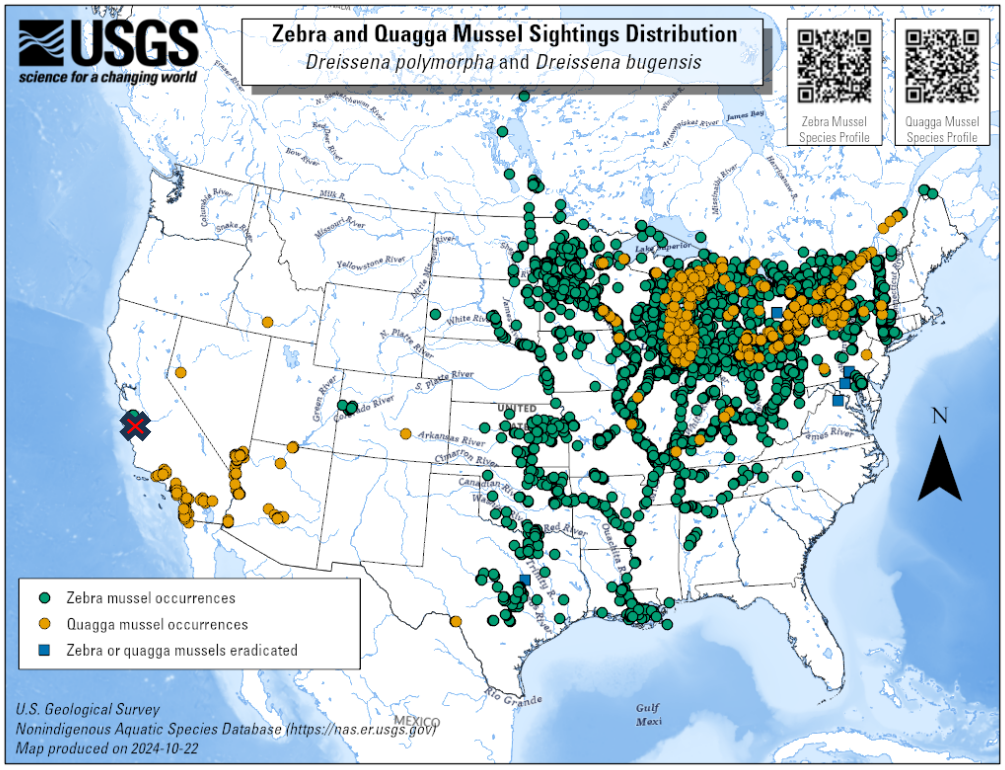

Figure 1. Current zebra and quagga mussel distribution in the United States. Map provided by US Geological Survey Non-Indigenous Species Database October 22, 2024. The golden mussel detection in California added to the map indicated by the red-X.

Program Activities

ODFW has the primary responsibility of operating watercraft inspection stations. ODFW technicians are trained in inspection and decontamination protocols set by "*Uniform Minimum Protocols and Standards for Watercraft Inspection and Decontamination Programs for Dreissenid Mussels in the Western United States IV.*" All technicians complete *Level 1 – Watercraft Inspection Training* and *Level II – Decontamination Training*. Technicians are assigned across five stations (Table 1).

The AIS program coordinators (ODFW and OSMB) are stationed in Salem. These positions have a variety of duties, including:

- Training, Watercraft Inspection Team (WIT) on procedures and protocols (watercraft inspection and decontamination, data collection and entry and interpersonal communications)
- Providing AIS training opportunities to other agencies, schools, fishing groups, boating clubs, volunteers and concerned citizens
- Developing, purchasing, and disseminating invasive species educational material (fact sheets, brochures, signs, risk assessments, etc.)
- Conducting watercraft inspections and decontaminations
- Aiding during eradication and control efforts
- Responding to public inquiries and sightings
- Surveying and collecting aquatic invasive species
- Staffing booths at public events
- Selling, processing and oversight of permit sales
- Providing updates to the Oregon Legislature
- Contracting and managing interagency agreements
- Serving as members of:
    - Oregon Invasive Species Council, 100th Meridian Columbia River Basin Team, Western Regional Panel for Aquatic Invasive Species and the Western Invasive Species Coordinator Effort.

Inspections and Compliance

In 2025, ODFW completed 21,136 watercraft inspections (Table 1) In addition to watercraft inspections and decontaminations, inspection teams attempt to track watercraft inspection compliance. As able, inspectors record the number of watercraft that were observed bypassing inspection stations. In 2025, staff observed 1,544 occurrences of non complains. While the observations in 2025 were much lower than previous years, noncompliance rates cannot be statistically analyzed due to sampling methodologies. However, a significant concern remains regarding compliance with required watercraft inspections in the state.

Decontaminations

During the inspection process, if an inspector observes a vessel contaminated with any aquatic invasive species, a decontamination is immediately performed on-site. The 277 vessels found with aquatic vegetation, marine or freshwater organisms, or other biofoulings were decontaminated by simple manual removal of the biofouling. Two vessels had unverifiable water

and were recently in high-risk waterbodies. These vessels received a hot flush of their ballast and bilge systems. Nine vessels contaminated with invasive freshwater mussels received a full

Table 1. Summary of ODFW's watercraft inspection station information for 2024

Station	Number of inspectors	Inspection dates	Inspections (N)	Intercepted watercraft with biofouling
Ashland	6	Year-round	8,718	27
Klamath Falls	3	4/29 – 9/12	3,537	69
Brookings	1	4/29 – 9/12	1,681	27
Ontario	6	Year-round	5,468	159
Umatilla	1	4/29 -10/04	820	6
Owyhee Roving	1	4/29 - 9/12	912	0
Total	18		21,136	288

decontamination performed on-site. One additional commercially hauled 38' motor yacht was found to be contaminated with mussels and could not be fully decontaminated on site due to its size and complexity. Staff coordinated with vessel broker, owner, and destination marina to perform a full decontamination of the vessel at the marina before the vessel was launched into the Columbia River near Portland.

The full decontamination procedure included hand removal, followed by a hot water high-pressure wash and reinspection (Figure 2 and 3). If the vessel was remaining in Oregon, a follow-up inspection/decontamination was performed at the owner's residence before the vessel was launched, or if the watercraft was going to another state, that other state was notified.

Figure 2 and 3. Boat intercepted at the ODFW's watercraft inspection stations. Boat was inspected and quagga mussels were found. ODFW decontaminated the boat on-site and re-inspected with no additional mussels found.

Outreach and Education

Education and outreach are key components of the AIS Prevention Program. Outreach occurs at the inspection stations, special events and requested trainings. These contacts enable face-to-face opportunities to explain the program, its benefits and the impacts of invasive species in Oregon.

Additionally, ODFW and OSMB provided printed materials at all inspection stations, AIS trainings, public meetings, and special events.

Since 2009, the AIS Prevention Program has offered a special training course to the public and government agencies upon request. Level I – Watercraft Inspection Training is a half-day class based on the 100th Meridian Initiative curriculum. The Level I instructors teach basic AIS biology and behavior and explain Oregon laws and regulations associated with the AIS Prevention Program. All ODFW and OSMB Level I instructors have completed the 100th Meridian Initiative Level I and Level II – Watercraft Inspection trainings.

In 2025, the AIS Prevention Program provided information to a variety of Oregonians, including:

- Bureau of Land Management
- Other ODFW programs
- US Forest Service
- Mt Hood Community College
- Portland State University
- Marine Law Enforcement Training Academy
- Umpqua Basin Hydrologist monthly meeting (virtual)
- Treasure Valley Community College
- Oregon Water Recourses Congress
- Oregon Water Recourses Department
- Various K-12 Schools and Programs

Funding Information

WRDA Funds

As part of the Water Resources Development Act, the program received $731,196 in federal funds from the US Army Corps of Engineers. These federal grant monies are designated for protection of the Columbia River Basin against aquatic invasive species and require matching funds; therefore, we used AIS Prevention Permit revenue as match. During 2025, we used this grant money to fund additional watercraft inspectors and increase hours of operation.

Aquatic Invasive Species Prevention Permit

OSMB has the lead role in implementing the AIS Permit Program. This permit program is the funding mechanism that supports activities outlined in this report. The OSMB distributes funds to ODFW, law enforcement agencies, and other partners via intergovernmental agreements and contracts for services. Permit revenues are deposited into a dedicated AIS Prevention Fund maintained by the OSMB.

Permit requirements vary for different types of watercraft. Oregon-registered motorized watercraft owners pay $5 fee every two years when they renew their registration. Current registration decals serve as proof of payment into the AIS Prevention Program. Owners of out-of-state motorized watercraft must purchase a non-resident motorized AIS Permit ($20 yearly) prior to boating in Oregon waters. Operators of all non-motorized watercraft 10 feet or longer in length (regardless of residency) must possess a Waterway Access Permit ($17 yearly). This permit for non-motorized watercraft includes payment into the AIS Prevention Fund. Out-of-state motorized AIS Permits and Waterway Access Permits are transferable to other watercraft within their respective categories. Discounted permits are available through OSMB for

businesses that rent watercraft (liveries), and river guides using non-motorized watercraft are offered permits at a discounted price through the OSMB.

Waterway Access Permits and out-of-state motorized AIS Permits are available for purchase online at OSMB and ODFW websites, in-person at OSMB headquarters, and anywhere that sells Oregon hunting/fishing licenses.

Program Financial Statement

During the 2025 fiscal year, revenue collected from permit sales totaled $827,362. Oregon motorized permit revenue from boater registrations was $296,995; Waterway Access Permit for non-motorized watercraft $421,697; out-of-state motorized $108,670; liveries and guides $4,260 (Figure 4). The 2025 fiscal year represents an average year for program revenue; long-term results show that funding has been stable and consistent since the program started in 2010.

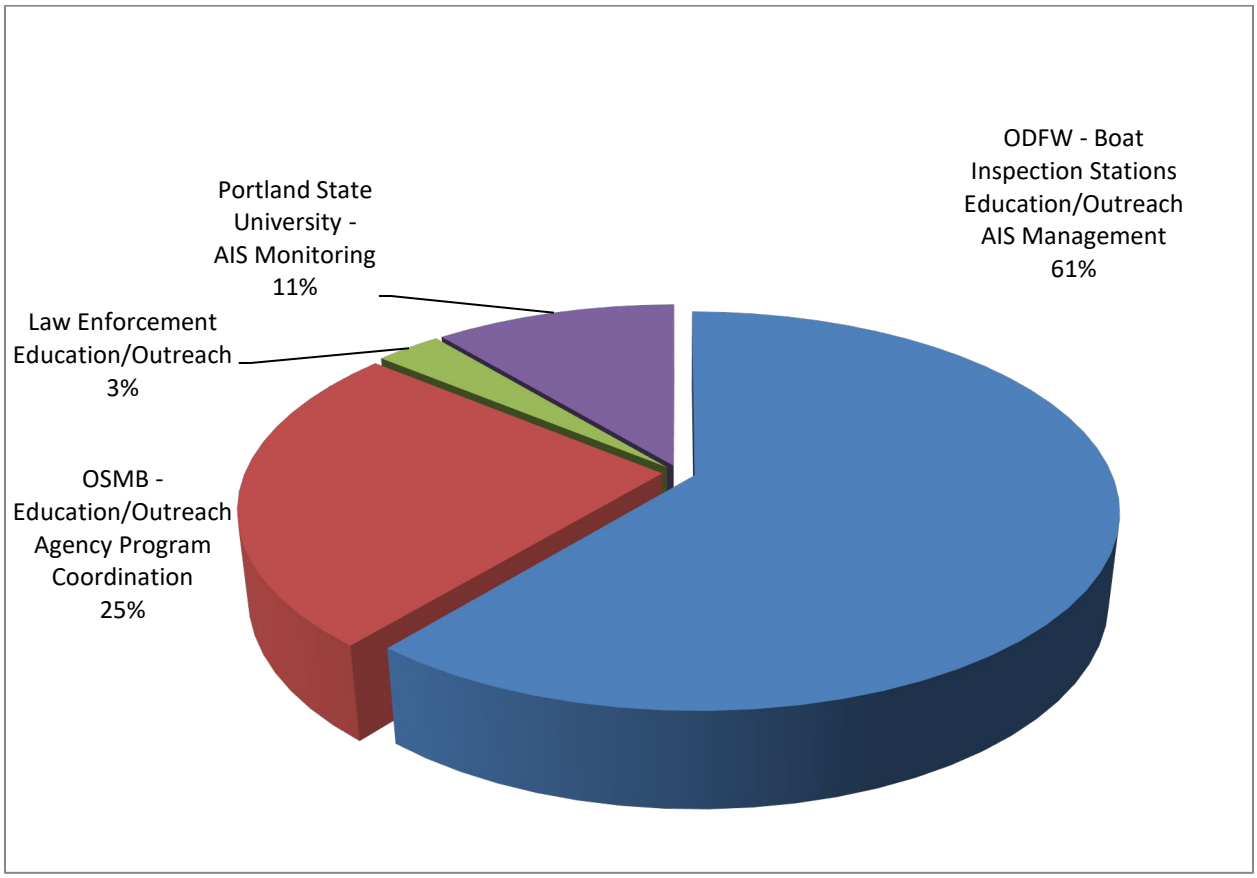

Figure 4. Allocation of Aquatic Invasive Species Prevention Program funds for fiscal 2025-year Oregon State Marine Board (OSMB) and Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife (ODFW).

Law Enforcement Activities

Law enforcement officers (LEO) (County Marine Patrol Deputies and the Oregon State Police Fish and Wildlife Troopers) conducted on-water-patrols and interact with the boating public. When a LEO contacts boaters on the water or at boat access sites, they enforce boating laws, perform safety checks, and respond to questions from the public about the AIS Prevention Program. The OSMB provides yearly training and program updates to LEO and they are

encouraged to focus on education rather than issuing citations to boaters that lack an AIS Prevention Permit or fail to stop at watercraft inspection stations.

Acknowledgements

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The Oregon State Marine Board would like to thank the Oregon Invasive Species Council and its members for their continued support and guidance for implementing this AIS Prevention Program. Also, a huge thank you to our Law Enforcement partners as their support and work within this program are vital to its success.