For Immediate Release – Joint Release  

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Oregon Prepares for Aquatic Invaders with Rapid Response Exercise

On May 19 and 20, a Rapid Response Team of local, state and federal natural resource agencies, and the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, convened for a virtual tabletop, scenario-based exercise in the event invasive quagga or zebra mussels are found in the Columbia River Basin.

The practice scenario involved a boat launching into Lake Billy Chinook after coming to the lake from mussel-infested Lake Pleasant, Arizona. In the scenario, the out-of-state boat launched and moored in a marina on the lake for 10 hours before the invasive mussels were detected. The exercise included monitoring and containment options ranging from facility closures, law enforcement assistance, and mandatory boat inspection/decontamination for boats leaving the waterbody.

The Rapid Response Team activated a mock command center and rapid response for containment and explored the best mitigation options for the conditions. There were several goals in conducting this proactive exercise: streamlining communication among action agencies, strengthening skills, improving response time and coordinating mussel containment actions.

Representatives from the Oregon State Marine Board, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, Oregon Department of Agriculture, Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, Portland General Electric, Invasive Species Action Network and the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission, participated in the exercise.
“Oregon needs to practice a rapid response plan and act fast,” said Glenn Dolphin, the Aquatic Invasive Species Coordinator for the Oregon State Marine Board. “The question isn’t if the mussels contaminate the basin, but when.” Dolphin continued, “We need to have everything dialed in, including technology and communication, to the point where the group is a well-tuned machine with leadership and procedures in place, so everyone knows what role they play.”

The Rapid Response Team took lessons-learned from neighboring states and the measures they’ve implemented to improve response through policy and planning during previous exercises.

“These types of exercises help reveal areas that might be missing or that might need to be strengthened in Oregon’s Rapid Response plan in order to be successful in an eradication effort. This is why it is important to have exercises and to work with various partners. Their expertise on the species and knowledge of the area is very valuable to successful eradication efforts,” says Rick Boatner, Invasive Species, Wildlife Integrity Supervisor for the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. “If you miss your window of opportunity for whatever reason, the mussels will take over an entire ecosystem and now you are dealing with containment and control, which is far more expensive and drastically increases the chance that the mussel will expand into more areas around the state,” adds Boatner.

“We are proud to be a part of this multi-agency, long-term, and proactive approach to invasive species prevention in the Columbia River Basin,” said Dr. Theresa Thom, Regional Aquatic Invasive Species Coordinator for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. “Our successes and lessons learned are being used to inform other rapid response efforts across the nation.”

Mandatory boat inspection stations in Oregon are the first line of defense, but most are only open seasonally during daytime hours, with Ashland and Ontario stations open year-round. Recreational boaters can help protect waterways with three simple steps: Clean, Drain, Dry their boat after every use. In 2020, all boaters are also now required to “pull the plug” and empty any water-holding compartments when leaving a waterbody and during transit.

The Marine Board and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife co-manage Oregon’s Aquatic Invasive Species Prevention Program. Non-motorized boats 10 feet long and longer are required to purchase and carry a Waterway Access Permit and non-resident motorboat owners must purchase an out-of-state aquatic invasive species permit (AIS).

A portion of the Waterway Access Permit, all of the out-of-state AIS permit fees, as well as a portion of Oregon’s motorized boat registration fees help fund the program. The revenue pays for aquatic invasive species inspection stations, decontamination equipment, staffing, law enforcement, and outreach materials.

For more information about aquatic invasive species permits and to purchase a permit, visit: https://myodfw.com/articles/waterway-access-and-aquatic-invasive-species-permits.

Learn more about aquatic invaders and see boat inspection reports at: https://www.oregon.gov/osmb/boater-info/Pages/Aquatic-Invasive-Species-Program.aspx.

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