

Fallen Leaf worried about invasive species from Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

FALLEN LEAF LAKE – Property owners at Fallen Leaf Lake are doing everything they can to keep their body of water more pristine than Lake Tahoe.

With aquatic invasive species already in the larger alpine lake, the smaller one is hoping to not have the same fate befall it.



Fallen Leaf is working hard to keep aquatic invasive species out.

Photo/Kathryn Reed

A real threat is a boat from Tahoe transporting an invasive specie to Fallen Leaf. The smaller lake has zero invasive species.

In a relatively short period of time the Fallen Leaf Lake Protection Association (FLLPA) was able to raise \$15,000. This allows the Tahoe Resource Conservation District to provide 40 hours of boat inspection service and education to the public

beyond what was already taking place.

The purpose of the nonprofit FLLPA is to work behind the scenes to achieve specific and targeted results. Besides talking aquatic species with homeowners at the May meeting, FLLPA leader John Kleppe mentioned keeping a careful eye on the snowmelt from Echo Peak because it can have a dramatic impact on the water level at Fallen Leaf Lake.

Another thing the FLLPA did was raise \$15,000 for the log boom in front of the dam that was installed in June 2007. This group was also active when MTBE was polluting Tahoe waterways.

Kleppe has been attending aquatic invasive species working group meetings for the Lake Tahoe Basin. Part of the organization is a subgroup devoted non-motorized watercraft.

He told the Fallen Leaf Lake Community Services District board last month that a sticker program for this lake on the edge of Desolation Wilderness could be created in the future for people removing their boats from there but not going elsewhere.

The latest \$15,000 will be spent mostly on targeting non-motorized watercraft and education. Aaron Fox will work Thursday-Monday; to be on-site during the busiest times.

“My job is patrolling, informing, inspecting and educating,” Fox said.

Lily Lake is part of his jurisdiction because it drains into Fallen Leaf via Glen Alpine Creek. He will also be monitoring Camp Concord, Stanford Sierra Camp and the other entry points for kayaks and canoes.

The U.S. Forest Service campground checks all rooftop boats that come into its jurisdiction.

“Clean, drain, dry” is the mantra of officials tasked with keeping aquatic invasives out of Tahoe and Fallen Leaf.

So far no invasive species have been found on a non-motorized watercraft. The same cannot be said of motorized. This is the third season boats entering Tahoe waterways have been inspected.

The reason for it is because species like quagga and zebra mussels can wipe out the usability of a lake, wreak havoc on water in-take infrastructure, do extreme damage to boats and severely impact a region's economy. Neither of those mussels has been found in Tahoe.

However, Tahoe does have Asian clams that the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency and others are trying to eradicate this summer. The Eurasian milfoil plant is another bother in the big lake.



New Zealand mudsnails. Photo/Provided

A New Zealand mudsnail was found on a boat at the Meyers checkpoint in May on its way to a launch ramp.

"They cause a lot of destruction in river and creek systems. They take out the bottom food chain like quagga and zebras do," said Nicole Cartwright, watercraft inspection program coordinator for the TRCD

Fishermen through felt-soled boots can even transport the mudsnails.

Earlier in the season a boat coming from the San Francisco Bay

had to be quarantined because a mussel similar to the quagga and zebra, but a salt-water species, was found. That boat had to be quarantined – meaning it's not going anywhere for seven to 30 days while either the California Department of Fish & Game or Nevada Division of Wildlife give it clearance to move on.

New this year is four inspection stations away from the marinas. They are at the gateways into the basin – Meyers, Spooner Summit, Northstar and Alpine Meadows.



The
decontaminatio
n rig at
Spooner
Summit.

Photo/Kathryn
Reed

“As far as saving people time at the ramp, it's a huge help in reducing that line,” Cartwright said. “The outlying stations are working great. We had a lot of traffic with the first big summer weekend last weekend. The idea is to capture every vessel before it's in the basin.”

If a boat gets by, inspections are being done at the marinas. Decontamination is off-site.

For the most part people understand the need for the inspections. In the first year about half of the boaters had heard about the program before reaching their destination. That percentage grew to 75 last year.

Cartwright said her agency was able reach about 14,000 boaters in 2009. Mailers, advertising and working with marinas are ways the TRCD is spreading the word.

If a boat at one of the four stations needs to be decontaminated that can take place there for an engine or bilge flush. A full decon has to be scheduled.

What's different at Fallen Leaf is all motorized boats are decontaminated at the marina.

A homeowner at Fallen Leaf has donated a skiff for TRCD's Fox to use when he is working. This allows him to get from Point A to Point B faster.

Education material is at the store and other places around the lake. Fox has pamphlets on him that he hands out.

Cartwright anticipates boat inspections and decontamination stations are something boaters at Tahoe and Fallen Leaf will face for the indefinite future.

For more information about boat inspections, [click here](#).