

\$5,000 penalty for evading Tahoe's boat inspectors

A boater who refused a mandatory invasive species decontamination earlier this summer faces a \$5,000 penalty for evading watercraft inspectors in order to launch illegally into Lake Tahoe. The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency Governing Board will decide the matter at their meeting Wednesday at Stateline.

On June 28, Tahoe Resource Conservation District watercraft inspectors at a boat ramp on the East Shore sent the boater away from the ramp for a mandatory decontamination because the boat he wanted to launch was determined to be high risk for invasive species.

All motorized watercraft in the Lake Tahoe Region are required to be inspected for aquatic invasive species, such as quagga and zebra mussels and New Zealand mudsnails, before being allowed to launch.

The boater's decontamination was scheduled for three days later, on July 1. When the boater did not show up for the decontamination, inspectors put the vessel's registration identification on a watch list as an alert to other launch and inspection sites.

Inspectors soon discovered that later on June 28 the vessel was brought to the roadside invasive species inspection station in Meyers where the boater gave different information to inspectors about the boat's origin. Inspectors found the boat to be clean and sealed the vessel which allowed the boater to launch at Meeks Bay.

Using the vessel's description and registration numbers, the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency watercraft team located the vessel and alerted the California Department of Fish & Game.

Wardens assisted in removing the boat from the Lake.

According to the operator's statement at the East Shore inspection site, the boat had come from Utah's Sand Hollow Reservoir, which is infested with quagga mussels. Quagga mussels are capable of multiplying to the trillions in only a few years.

Although it was later verified that the boat had not last launched in Sand Hollow Reservoir, but rather had come from Lake Powell in Arizona and was likely not a high risk, the evasion of inspectors is a serious violation, according to Tahoe Regional Planning Agency Aquatic Invasive Species Program Manager Ted Thayer.

Immediately following this incident, Conservation District inspectors changed their watch list procedures such that the registration identification of any vessel sent for decontamination is circulated to all inspection locations and launch sites as a prohibited vessel. The registration identification is not removed from the watch list until the boat has been decontaminated.