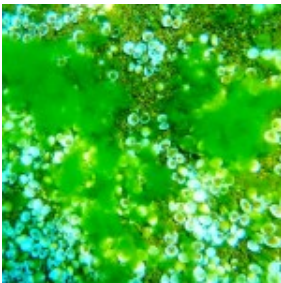


Agencies try to root out invasive species from Tahoe

By Max Neale

On April 5, the Lake Tahoe Aquatic Invasive Species Coordination Committee hosted its first Aquatic Invasive Species public forum at the U.S. Forest Service building in South Lake Tahoe. The event featured expert speakers from the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, UC Davis, and was facilitated by the Tahoe Resource Conservation District. Topics of discussion included AIS threats nationwide and basinwide, the latest research on Lake Tahoe AIS, past and upcoming control management efforts and upcoming changes to the watercraft inspection program.

Steve Chilton, Lake Tahoe and Northern Nevada AIS coordinator for the Fish and Wildlife Service, described AIS, such as the Asian clam and Eurasian water milfoil, as “a serious problem for Lake Tahoe, both ecologically and economically.” Chilton explained that in the United States AIS cause hundreds of millions of dollars in damage and control costs annually.



Elk Point
Asian clam bed
during a
summer 2008
algal bloom.
Photo/Provided

He cites Lake Mead as an example where the quagga mussel, first discovered there in 2007, has spread to nearly every corner of the lake and is now adversely affecting the valuable striped bass fishery. The goals of Lake Tahoe's AIS Management Plan are to prevent new invaders and to monitor, control and eradicate those that currently exist.

Ted Thayer, manager of TRPA's AIS program, presented on the history and structure of Lake Tahoe's research and management efforts. Thayer emphasized the wide reaching impacts of AIS, which have extensive economic, ecological, and social consequences. He also described the importance of Tahoe's collaborative approach to management, which involves more than 50 organizations and agencies working together to prevent and control AIS. The efficacy of this partnership was recently recognized with an award to commend the excellent work being done in the Tahoe basin to combat and prevent AIS from the U.S. Forest Service headquarters in Washington, D.C.

While last week's forum highlighted past successes, it also addressed the many challenges that currently face Lake Tahoe. Patrick Stone, senior wildlife biologist with TRPA, spoke to the history of aquatic plant invasions, current control methods, and the importance of the watercraft inspection program. "The [watercraft inspection] program is designed to stop all AIS from entering Lake Tahoe and also to prevent their spread within the Basin."

Ken Kasman, director of watercraft inspections at TRPA, further described the program as the way best way "to lower this risk of new invasions while still allowing access to the lake."

Watercraft inspection fees for the 2011 boating season will range from \$30-\$100, depending on vessel size. According to Kasman, inspection fees raise only 29 percent of the funds necessary to operate the inspection program. Federal funding from the Fish and Wildlife Service, state and private sources

provide the majority share.

Several researchers, including Lars Andersen from the USDA, Geoff Schladow from the UC Davis Tahoe Environmental Research Center, and Jay Rowan of the California Department of Fish & Game, outlined research projects for the 2011 field season. Highlights included two pilot projects for control of the Asian clam, a dye study to test the feasibility of aquatic herbicide use in the Tahoe Keys, and a project that aims to reduce the populations of largemouth bass and bluegill, two species of warm water nonnative fish present in the Tahoe Keys.

During the public comment period several people and local business owners raised concerns about boat inspection protocols and the potential economic impact of a reduced bass fishery in the Keys.

A video of the event will be available at www.tahoercd.org. The next AIS public forum is scheduled for fall 2011. Sign up for the Tahoe RCD newsletter to stay informed.

Max Neale is an AmeriCorps member serving as the monitor/control coordinator at the Tahoe Resource Conservation District.