

# Mandatory boat inspections to expand to Truckee area

By Katherine E. Hill

TRUCKEE – Truckee-area waterways will implement a regional mandatory boat inspection program in summer 2012, with public meetings being conducted to gather input before the program is crafted by the Tahoe Resource Conservation District.

The next meeting will be Aug. 25 at the Truckee Donner Public Utility District office at 5:30pm. The final meeting will be on Sept. 29.

The first meeting on July 28 drew only about a dozen people, and the majority were local officials already invested in the boat inspection program. Tahoe RCD, which also manages the inspection program on Lake Tahoe and Echo and Fallen Leaf lakes for the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, is developing the Truckee regional program. The Truckee program will include Donner Lake, and Prosser Creek, Boca and Stampede reservoirs. The Tahoe RCD is conducting voluntary inspections at these waterways, but mandatory inspections are needed to keep invasive species, like the destructive quagga and zebra mussels, out of local lakes and reservoirs, officials say.



Quagga mussels  
like these on  
a boat prop  
leaving Lake

Mead are what officials want to keep out of uncontaminated lakes.

Photo/TRPA

“The zebra and quagga mussels are the scariest of the invasive species,” said Kimberly Boyd, Tahoe RCD invasive species program manager, at the July 28 forum.

Zebra and quagga mussels would be the priority for the boat inspection program, but the program also would address other aquatic invasive species such as New Zealand mudsnails, Asian clams and Eurasian milfoil. While mussels have not been detected in local waterways, Eurasian milfoil is in Lake Tahoe, Martis Creek Reservoir and the Truckee River, and Asian clams have been found in Lake Tahoe and Donner Lake, said Dave Roberts, Tahoe RCD district manager.

Tahoe RCD officials said during the forum that the need to keep aquatic invasive species out of local waterways is broad reaching. AIS affect the food supply of native species and the health of local waterways, including Lake Tahoe’s famed clarity. For the Truckee region, AIS in local waterways also will affect the water supply for the Reno-Sparks area, which gets 80 percent of its drinking water from the Truckee River. While the river originates in Lake Tahoe, Donner, Boca, Prosser Creek, Stampede, Martis Creek and Independence Lake are all part of the river’s watershed. Any AIS in local waterways will mean infected drinking water supplies.

Locals will be the most affected by the mandatory program, as about 55 percent of boaters using the waters within the Truckee River watershed also live within it, according to a survey conducted by UNR, for the Tahoe RCD. Of those boaters, about 61 percent are anglers and 17 percent are water skiers and wake boarders.

No fees were discussed at the meeting. Fees will depend on how the program is crafted and any outside funding sources that could be used to offset the cost to boaters, Boyd said.



Mandatory boat inspections are coming to Donner Lake in 2012.

Photo/Katherine E. Hill

Boaters can now find inspectors at the Donner Lake boat launch, as well as roving the east side of Boca and Stampede Reservoirs educating boaters about AIS and conducting voluntary inspections through Sept. 30. Free decontaminations also are offered.

The challenge, once a mandatory inspection program is in place, will be where to have them. Unlike Donner Lake, which has only one public boat launch, boaters using local reservoirs can launch from the shore. Officials will be looking at where to conduct the inspections next summer to catch all boaters, with the Hirshdale exit off Interstate 80 cited as one possible location.

“The Truckee area has enormous shoreline launching with uncontrolled launch sites,” Boyd said.

The public forum, which lasted about 1½ hours, focused on educating the audience about AIS, the voluntary inspection program and boating in the Truckee region. What it did not do

is outline a mandatory boat inspection program. Instead, officials want the public to tell them what a boat program should include and then the Tahoe RCD will craft a program around those needs.

The Tahoe RCD wants public input on the use of a banding and/or sticker program like the one being used at Lake Tahoe, where boaters receive a sticker after passing an inspection before launching and the boats are banded to the trailer when it comes out of the lake. The seal is required to remain intact before the next launch, or an inspection must be performed again.

Other topics open for discussion include possible locations for inspection stations, fines for non-compliance, restricting access to local waterways, decontamination of infected boats, inspections of fishing equipment, education and outreach, and fees.

Once the forums are finished, Boyd said the Tahoe RCD would form a plan and then seek funding to operate the mandatory inspection program. The district also would have to get approval from myriad public agencies that control the different waterways, like the Nevada County Board of Supervisors, Town of Truckee, California State Parks, U.S. Forest Service and others. This process could take months, she said, noting that it would be next summer before a mandatory program could be implemented.

The Truckee River Fund has been funding the voluntary boat inspection program, as well as efforts to establish a mandatory program. The fund was established by the Truckee Meadows Water Authority, which oversees the drinking water for the Reno-Sparks area.

## **A look at AIS**

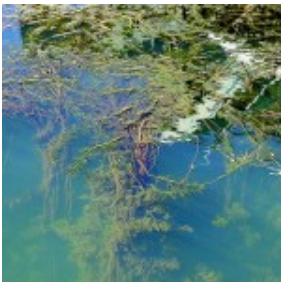
**Quagga and zebra mussels** are at the center of Lake Tahoe's inspection program.

These mussels, which are hitching rides on boats and trailers and in ballast tanks, bladders and live wells, are spreading across the West. Quagga and zebra mussels will spread rapidly once they are introduced to a lake and will gorge on the food supply, kill fish and pollute the clarity of the lake. They will clog cooling system water intakes, causing motors to overheat. As well, they have been found in pipes in municipal water systems.

The mussels can also be found on kayaks, water toys, wetsuits and any equipment exposed to infected waters.

Young quagga mussels will feel like sandpaper to the touch, while adults usually have dark concentric rings on the shell. The mussels can grow up to 1.6 inches, making the young mussels hard to spot. Full grown mussels are usually smaller than a quarter.

**Eurasian milfoil**, a fast-growing invasive plant, is believed to have been intentionally introduced in the



Milfoil is throughout the Tahoe Keys. Photo/TRPA

South Lake Tahoe area, where it has proliferated. The milfoil is commonly found in aquariums and researchers believe that someone dumped out a fish tank into Lake Tahoe, thereby setting off an environmental nightmare. Simply breaking off a plant fragment will cause it to spread and reproduce, and it is choking parts of Lake Tahoe, including the Tahoe Keys,

where the milfoil has to be regularly removed to keep the waterway clear. The plants latch onto motor boats, causing it to spread across the lake, where it degrades water quality, decreases oxygen levels in the water, destroys native habitat and creates habitat for non-native species. Researchers are working on methods to eradicate the milfoil in Lake Tahoe.

**Asian clams** grow to only about 1½ inches, but rapidly reproduce and compete with native species for food. The clams also affect the clarity of Lake Tahoe. The clams likely arrived in Lake Tahoe on boat that came from infected waterways and from aquariums being dumped into Lake Tahoe. Researchers are working on methods to eradicate the clams in Lake Tahoe.

**New Zealand mudsnails** are about the size of a pencil lead when fully grown and are hard to spot. The mudsnails have been infesting rivers and streams across the Western United States, often found latching onto the gear and boots of fishermen; they can be hard to distinguish from boot laces. The mudsnails reduce the food supply for trout and have no natural predators in the United States.

### **Next meeting**

Tahoe RCD will conduct the Aug. 25 public forum at the Truckee Donner Public Utility District office, 11570 Donner Pass Road, Truckee. For more information, go online or call (530) 587.4911.