

Opinion: Boat inspections are an inconvenience, but a must for water quality

By Ron Penrose

Protecting our drinking water source is vital to our entire community. Truckee Meadows Water Authority has helped fund many different programs and projects designed to protect Lake Tahoe and the Truckee River. The Truckee River Fund, which was established in 2004 by TMWA's board of directors, was created for the purpose of protecting and enhancing water quality of the Truckee River and its watershed. Through matching grants, the TRF has been able to fund projects that achieve this mission.

Mandatory boat inspections, managed by the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency and partially funded by the TRF, is one program that is aimed at protecting our drinking water by preventing the introduction of quagga mussels into our water source. If you are a boater and have been enjoying Lake Tahoe this summer, you have no doubt noticed that boat inspections are mandatory, but you may not know why.



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Lake Tahoe is known for its beauty, clarity and clean water. We are fortunate to have such a pristine source for this community's primary drinking water supply. Boat and watercraft

inspections are our first line of defense against quagga mussels entering Lake Tahoe. Quagga mussels can wreak havoc on bodies of water. They are very harmful to a native ecosystem since they disrupt the natural food chain and once established, they are nearly impossible to eradicate.

The quagga mussel will clog water supply pipelines and can cause extensive damage to water system infrastructure that can cost millions to repair. They can leave formerly pristine beaches littered with dead shells. They could also disrupt our hydroelectric plants' intakes causing higher energy and maintenance costs. Because quagga mussels are extremely efficient breeders, they take hold in a water source very quickly and thrive in very deep bodies of water creating "dead zones" in lakes they occupy.

Our community is working diligently to keep mussels from entering Lake Tahoe and other upstream reservoirs. Let's keep it that way.

As a boater, you can help prevent quagga mussel infestation by abiding by the boat inspection regulations that are designed to protect the lake you are enjoying. We know that this invasive species hitches rides on watercraft and then spread to other bodies of water. The irreversible quagga and zebra mussel infestations of Lake Mead and the Great Lakes are thought to have been caused by this mechanism.

Some might find these mandatory boat inspections to be inconvenient, delaying their enjoyment of Lake Tahoe. However, to TMWA staff, who are dedicated to delivering to you great quality drinking water, this small delay helps preserve the pristine nature of Lake Tahoe which is so vitally important to our drinking water supply, recreational enjoyment and tourism based economy.

I hope you enjoy Lake Tahoe this summer.

Ron Penrose is project manager for the Truckee Meadows Water

Authority.