

Governor signs bill to fund quagga mussel inspection program

By Lisa Lien-Mager, Association of California Water Agencies

Gov. Jerry Brown has signed ACWA-sponsored legislation designed to combat the spread of invasive quagga mussels.

SB215, authored by Sen. Bob Huff, R-Diamond Bar, extends the sunset of the successful mussel inspection program led by the Department of Fish and Game and the Department of Food and Agriculture. Previously set to expire at the end of this year, the mussel inspection program was first created in 2007 to allow the state to conduct inspections of vehicles and water bodies and order quarantines of any infested water bodies. The law also authorizes the state to implement measures to prevent and eradicate infestations, including education.

Quagga mussels are an invasive nonnative species that breed very fast, have no known predators, and can quickly colonize new areas within California waters. Once they infest a water body, they cover piers, boat launches, and water intake facilities. There is no effective eradication method, and the cost to manually remove these mussels from water intake screens and pipes is millions of dollars per year for the state's water system operators.

The state has created an ongoing prevention and education program to help keep these unwanted guests away, including a marketing campaign to get recreational boaters and others to pay attention to the hidden cargo that they may be carrying. The cost to run the program and inspections is estimated at close to \$10 million total for both departments combined through the end of 2014.

Despite the price tag during a difficult budget year, the Legislature determined the short-term investment of special funds was worth the cost to help avoid a long-term serious infestation in state waters that could cost billions of dollars in damage and repair costs.

“We are pleased that Gov. Brown and the Legislature recognized the importance of continuing this aggressive program to combat the spread of invasive quagga mussels,” said ACWA Executive Director Timothy Quinn in a statement. “S 215 will ensure that the current and effective efforts continue uninterrupted.”