

# Opinion: Boat inspections prove to be beneficial

By Joanne Marchetta

I often speak about the importance of partnerships in this column and once again circumstances have proven the value of our collective teamwork and collaboration. Last week, the multi-sector partnership of the aquatic invasive species program prevented a boat from entering the lake that had quagga mussels and snail shells hidden within mud on the anchor.

Despite the fact that the boat was otherwise clean, drained, and dry, invasive quagga and snail shells were found by inspectors in the anchor locker of the boat from Lake Mead, a known-infected water body. Without the rigorous watercraft inspection program that TRPA leads in partnership with the Tahoe Resource Conservation District, this boat could have put the lake at risk.



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We continue to get the message out to boaters that they are on the front line in our fight against invasive species. The majority of all watercraft arrive at Tahoe clean, drained, and dry. However, one simple act of carelessness could devastate the lake's ecosystem along with our recreation-based economy. Research has shown that even in Lake Tahoe's cold, high

altitude waters, new invasive species could wreak havoc.

That's why TRPA is leading a public-private partnership of more than 40 organizations to secure funds to keep the watercraft inspection program going next year. Boater fees cover half of the \$1.5 million cost of the annual invasive species prevention program and federal funds historically have covered the balance. This federal funding is drying up and the program is in urgent need of new revenue sources to continue boat inspections in 2015.

We are tasked with a seemingly insurmountable challenge: how to continue to share this special place while also protecting it from the threat of infestation from aquatic invasive species. We've kept new destructive invaders out of Lake Tahoe over the last five years – the program has resulted in 36,000 watercraft inspections, 14,000 decontaminations of suspect or fouled vessels, nearly 30 acres of invasive weed removal, and unprecedented public awareness of the threat of invasive species. However, our work is far from done. The stakes are high. To fail could mean unimaginable environmental and economic consequences. To be successful, we must continue to work cooperatively.

Each of us has a role to play, and by that I mean residents and visitors alike. Even non-motorized watercraft should be mindful of the "clean, drain, and dry" message. The Tahoe Keepers program has successfully registered nearly 2,000 paddlers who have pledged to keep a watchful eye out for invasive species and self-inspect their watercraft.

The Tahoe watercraft inspection program has been recognized nationally for its high standards while still allowing recreational boating access to Lake Tahoe. Many water bodies have been closed to boating entirely because of quagga mussel threats or infestations. TRPA staff members have spoken at congressional briefings in Washington DC to raise awareness of what is now a national issue while at the same time sharing

our successes and challenges here at Lake Tahoe.

So, our focus must remain on preventing the introduction of quagga and zebra mussels and other invasive species, while working to successfully manage those aquatic invaders already in Lake Tahoe, such as the Asian clam. Our efforts will require the continued participation of the boating community, scientists and researchers, volunteers, well-trained inspectors, managers of private and public launch facilities, the conservation community, and all else with a stake in Lake Tahoe. Moving forward, we will continue improving the inspection program and remain open to constructive feedback and suggestions.

All who have contributed to this effort thus far – in particular those who have given up money, time, and convenience – will have a mussel-free Lake Tahoe in the future to show for it. For up-to-date information about the inspection program, go to TRPA's website.

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