

Tahoe boat inspections keeping invasives out

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – It's working.

That was the message Dennis Zabaglo, Tahoe Regional Planning Agency's aquatic resources program manager, delivered to the Governing Board on April 27 about the boat inspection program.

The program started eight years ago without everyone being on board. Since then, though, other lakes have started inspection programs, boaters have learned the importance of having a clean boat and invasive mussels have not reached Lake Tahoe.

In 2015, there were 6,800 local inspections, 2,300 decontaminations and 40 boats with invasives intercepted. These numbers are similar to 2014, but less than previous years. This is attributed to the low lake level keeping people away.

Zabaglo said the decrease in decontaminations is also attributable to boaters understanding the "clean, drain, dry" philosophy so invasives are not transported from one water body to another. Boats are the No. 1 way aquatic invasive species enter a lake.

Lake Tahoe is home to clams, weeds and fish that are invasive. To date, though, the more dangerous quagga and zebra mussels have been kept at bay. Last year investigators stopped one boat with an invasive mussel. In prior years about a dozen came through the inspection line. Most of those were from the Great Lakes area.

With Nevada officials implementing a screening of all boats leaving Lake Mead, that, too, is curtailing the spread of the

mussels.

The mussels can ruin water supplies, filtration systems, the ecosystem, watercraft and potentially the economy.

TRPA is continuing to work with Truckee on inspections in waterways just outside the basin like Donner Lake.

Zabaglo said the five- and 10-year goals include creating more enhanced, permanent inspection facilities, which in turn would pay for themselves. Some could be like mini visitors centers. A grant is being applied for that would fund these.

The boat inspections resume May 1 from 8:30am-5:30pm.

They are located at:

- Meyers: The junction of highway 50 and 89, seven days.
- Spooner Summit: Junction of highways 50 and 28, seven days.
- Alpine Meadows: Highway 89, off Alpine Meadows Road north of Tahoe City, Thursday-Sunday.
- Truckee-Tahoe: Highway 267, off Truckee Airport Road, Thursday-Sunday, opens May 19.

Fees are staying the same. They have not changed since 2014. Boats only accessing Tahoe pay \$30, while boats coming in and out of Tahoe pay based on the length of the vessel, with the most common price being \$86.

Inspections also are necessary for Fallen Leaf and Echo lakes users. Boaters need to get inspected and decontaminated prior to going to those ramps, with Meyers being the closest location. Neither of those lakes has any invasives.

The inspection program costs about \$1.5 million a year. Half of that comes from the inspection fees, the other half is divided equally between California and Nevada. This is the first year the states have funded the inspections. Prior to

that more than half came from the feds via the Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act.

One board member asked if it's possible for boaters to sneak in when inspectors are not on site.

"Boaters are compliant. They understand," Zabaglo said.

TRPA also did a "secret shopper" scenario last year with an outside agency to test inspectors. They all passed. That type of oversight will continue.