

Stringent boat program keeps new AIS from Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – In the decade since Lake Tahoe started aggressively combating aquatic invasive species, the landscape has changed dramatically.

This region has become a leader in what to do to stop invasives. Water bodies far and near have scrambled to catch up as they contend with the detrimental impact of AIS. The boating industry has made advances to make it easier to hook up decontamination apparatuses. The public is more compliant and understanding.

Boating season officially opens today in the Lake Tahoe Basin, at least when it comes to the boat inspections and decontamination stations being operational.

The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency Governing Board last week received an update on the AIS program, which includes the boating inspection program.

It's anticipated more boat ramps will be open this year because the lake level is so high. Public and private ramps are required to make sure boats have been inspected.

"Our focus is early detection and rapid response," Dennis Zabaglo, TRPA's aquatic resources manager, told the board.

The Tahoe Resource Conservation District manages the program for the TRPA. Lake Tahoe, Fallen Leaf Lake and Echo Lake are part of its oversight.

In 2016, there were 7,689 boat inspections, 2,689 decontaminations, with 39 boats intercepted. The last figure means a boat that had an AIS. Zabaglo said most boat owners

are unaware of the AIS. Eight of 39 were mussel species.



Boat inspection info:

- Open now 8:30am-5:30pm., 7 days a week

Meyers: at the junction of highways 50 and 89

Spooner Summit: at the junction of highways 50 and 28

Alpine Meadows: Highway 89, off Alpine Meadows Road north of Tahoe City

- Opening May 17:

Truckee-Tahoe: Highway 267, off Truckee Airport Road, 8:3am-5:30pm, 7 days a week

- All motorized watercraft require inspection for aquatic invasive species prior to launching into Lake Tahoe, Fallen Leaf Lake and Echo Lake.

- Knowingly transporting AIS into Lake Tahoe is against the law, and violators may be subject to monetary penalties.

- There is no change in boating inspection fees this

year. The “Tahoe In & Out” inspection ranges from \$35 for personal watercraft and vessels up to 17 feet and \$121 for vessels more than 39 feet. The “Tahoe Only” inspection sticker is \$30. An additional fee of \$35 is charged for any boat requiring decontamination and an additional \$10 fee for the decontamination of ballast tanks or bags.

Between one-third and one-half of the inspections are boaters new to Tahoe.

Clean, drain, dry is the mantra boaters – motorized and paddlers – are asked to embrace. Boats are the largest transporters of AIS.

The goal of the TRPA program is to prevent any new AIS from entering local water bodies. AIS such as quagga mussels and New Zealand mudsnails (neither of which are in Tahoe) multiply quickly by colonizing on underwater surfaces, and can destroy infiltration systems. They obliterate fish habitat, ruin boat engines, and can negatively impact water quality and the local economy by impacting recreation and the ecosystem.

The AIS program also deals with trying to remove, or at least reduce, the species that already exist – animal and plant.

Several board members applauded when TRPA staff made it known the **Tahoe Keys Property Owners Association** voted to pay for the use of herbicides in the South Lake Tahoe canals to attack invasive weeds. A member of the public challenged that reaction, wondering how they could think this was a good thing. Board Chairman Jim Lawrence said what he was really

applauding was the Keys being willing to pay for the treatment, not necessarily the type of treatment. No other board member explained his or her applause.

The Governing Board will be asked to approve a permit for TKPOA to use the herbicide. A request for proposal has been released to find a firm to do the environmental impact statement for the Keys' project.

TRPA/TRCD are also working with Fleur de Lac on a plan to work on AIS this summer. Both entities are working on the **ultraviolet** project at Lakeside. Getting rid of clams at Sand Harbor is another goal for this season.

Julie Regan, external affairs chief for TRPA, said congressional leaders are aware of the danger of AIS spreading. AIS are a threat to hydroelectric systems. Regan is hopeful with the new secretary of the Interior being from Montana that he will be a friend to the West and continue the funding for AIS projects here and elsewhere.