



# Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Aquatic Invasive Species Update  
Legislative Finance Committee  
March 12-13, 2018

## **Introduction:**

The Aquatic Invasive Species Program at FWP had an incredibly successful season in 2017. The program significantly expanded last year with over 200 seasonal staff hired to operate 35 watercraft inspection stations state-wide. Early detection survey more than doubled and lab capacity was expanded to provide rapid sample analysis. The mussel issue in Montana captured the attention of the West and many were closely watching the program to see how we responded and what was found. Some highlights from the 2017 season include:

## **Watercraft Inspection:**

- 35 watercraft inspection stations operated by over 200 seasonal staff.
- Over 86,000 watercraft were inspected.
- 17 watercraft were intercepted transporting zebra / quagga mussels into the state.
- Over 80 citations and nearly 300 written warnings were issued related to invasive species violations.

## **Survey:**

- State-wide over 1,500 plankton tow samples from over 240 waterbodies were collected and analyzed for zebra / quagga mussel larvae early detection this season. No mussel larvae or adults were observed in 2017.
- Invasive mussel DNA was observed in samples collected from Tiber this season.
  - The use of environmental DNA (eDNA) for invasive mussel detection is a developing science and is not used as an operational early detection tool by other states.
  - In coordination with MISC, a Science Advisory Panel is being assembled to advise FWP on the utility and limitations of using eDNA for dreissenid mussel early detection.
- Surveys involve monitoring for all AIS including invasive snails, clams, crayfish and weeds. No new AIS populations were detected in the state in 2017.

## **Outreach and Education:**

- FWP, in coordination with the Department of Commerce, has hired an advertising firm to assist with development and implementation of a comprehensive AIS marketing plan targeting boaters that are potentially transporting AIS into the state.
- FWP is working closely with MISC, UC3, DNRC, MDT, MDA, Tribes, Conservation Districts, Watershed Districts and user groups to develop targeted outreach materials and coordinate AIS education.

## **Other Efforts:**

- Draft Dreissenid Rapid Response Guidelines are now in place to guide a response in the event that mussels are identified in a new location in the state.
- Incident Command System (ICS) training is scheduled for May to help prepare FWP staff to respond to natural resources emergencies.

**Lessons Learned and Plans for 2018:** The AIS program has completed data analysis and program evaluation from the 2017 season. Watercraft inspection and AIS monitoring reports are now available at [www.CleanDrainDryMT.com](http://www.CleanDrainDryMT.com). Although last season was very successful a number of program improvements are planned for 2018. All aspects of the program are being evaluated and multiple changes are underway to make the program more effective and efficient in 2018. Changes planned for the 2018 season include:

- **Staffing:** Finding and keeping quality staff at watercraft inspection stations was a challenge in some locations last season.
  - In 2018, recruiting is starting early and FWP is reaching out to Conservation Districts and local partners to assist identifying potential inspection station staff.
  - Training is being revised and protocols are being updated. Training classes this season will be smaller, will have a stronger hands-on component and will be held regionally.
- **Watercraft Inspection Data Collection:** An electronic data collection systems will be utilized in 2018. This is a free app, developed by the state of Colorado and is currently used by watercraft inspection programs in 6 western states. This app will allow for:
  - Real time data entry and access to ensure quality control.
  - The ability to query for previous inspections.
  - Expedite low-risk inspections.
  - App will be available for use for partners inspection watercraft in the state.
- **Watercraft Inspection Passport:** A booklet that is used as proof of inspection and helps expediting low-risk inspections.
- **Station Dates of Operation:** Vary station seasonal opening depending on AIS risk in that area. Stations planned to open from late March through May.
- **Change Location at Several Stations:** Move two eastern Montana stations to better intercept high risk boat traffic. Culbertson to Nashua (Hwy 2 westbound) and Ft Peck Visitor Center to Flowing Wells (Hwy 200).
- **On-Site Storage:** Addition of on-site storage / office space at inspection stations to allow for washers and equipment to be stored on-site.
- **Coordination with Partner Inspection Stations:** FWP plans to coordinate closely with partners that are conducting watercraft inspections in Montana including the CSKT, and Blackfeet tribes, the City of Whitefish and Glacier National Park to help ensure consistency and standardized protocols.
  - FWP plans to contract watercraft inspection operation through CSKT, Blackfeet Tribe, Missoula County and the Garfield County Conservation District.
- **Enhanced Containment Efforts:** Shifting station locations / station layout to better address boat traffic exiting Tiber and Canyon Ferry.
  - Additional enforcement at Tiber and Canyon Ferry to support inspection and Certified Boater requirements.
- **AIS Monitoring Data Collection:** FWP has developed a data collection app that will be used to track invasive species sampling and survey in 2018. This app will be available to partners around the state that are conducting AIS survey. In cooperation with the Natural Heritage Program, survey data will be publicly available for review.

- Monitoring for AIS will be coordinated between stakeholders in 2018 to maximize the probability for early detection.
  - FWP AIS lab has offered to process any samples submitted by partners for veliger early detection analysis.
- **Active Engagement with Regional Efforts:** FWP will continue to work closely with regional AIS efforts and federal partners to strengthen and expand regional prevention and early detection efforts and identify additional funding to support the AIS program in Montana.