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June 22, 2017

Honorable Ryan Zinke
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W., Room 6151
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Zinke:

Western Governors are concerned about the economic and ecologic impacts caused by invasive species on western landscapes and Pacific Islands. These concerns are captured in Western Governors' Association (WGA) Policy Resolution [2016-05](#), *Combating Invasive Species*, in which Governors identify the rapid spread of invasive species as one of the nation's "biggest environmental problems." In the resolution, Governors "strongly encourage expansion and creation of partnerships" for invasive species control and "support coordinated prevention efforts and early detection and rapid response with multistate management and eradication actions to limit or eliminate new introductions and existing species expansion."

Of special concern to Western Governors are the risks posed by quagga and zebra mussels, which have already infested water impoundments in the Colorado River Basin and other waterbodies across the West. Western Governors believe that it is of paramount concern to prevent the spread of these mussels to other major western waterbodies, including the Columbia River Basin, Lake Tahoe, and the Colorado River Basin above Lake Powell.

The waterbodies in the West that are not yet infested represent a significant amount of investment and value in habitat for endangered and sensitive species, hydropower production, transportation, irrigation, and recreation. The infrastructure investment in these waterbodies comes from federal, state, and private entities. As such, there is broad interest in ensuring that the movement of these invasive species from known infested waterbodies to "clean" waterbodies is prevented to every practicable extent.

The movement of contaminated watercraft between waterbodies and impoundments is a primary vector for the spread of quagga and zebra mussels. The risks posed by these mussels can be significantly reduced by intergovernmental cooperation in monitoring and prevention, as well as increased participation in established boat decontamination practices, particularly at infested impoundments on the Colorado River.

Many of the largest infested waterbodies in the West, including sections of the Colorado River and its impoundments, are managed by the Department of the Interior (DOI). Several DOI agencies hold responsibility for the inspection and reporting of infested watercraft in these waterbodies. Western Governors believe that current DOI management practices and regulations for boat inspection and decontamination on infested water bodies on the Colorado River are insufficient to prevent the movement of quagga and zebra mussels to uninfested waterbodies. Western Governors believe that changes in DOI management practices, coupled with increased intergovernmental collaboration and coordination, could help reduce the urgent risk that aquatic invasive species pose to western environments and economies.

Western Governors are supportive of the underlying goals and principles contained within the [“Model Regulation for State Watercraft Inspection and Decontamination Programs”](#) and the [“Model Legislative Provisions & Guidance to Promote Reciprocity among State Watercraft Inspection and Decontamination Programs”](#). These documents were developed through a collaboration with western state agencies, the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, the Sea Grant Law Center, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Western Governors believe that these model frameworks should be viewed as a foundation for coordinated and consistent boat inspection and decontamination practices in the West.

Review of State Resources and Aquatic Invasive Species Control Efforts

Western states provide significant leadership and resources in efforts to combat the spread of invasive species. State-directed programs provide place-based solutions tailored to unique regional or local conditions in land and aquatic ecosystems, as well as on-the-ground actions for the control of invasive species, including quagga and zebra mussels. Examples of state-led efforts and resource commitments include:

Idaho

Idaho’s Invasive Species program has been in place since 2009. After operating on an annual budget of \$1.2 million through 2016, the Idaho Legislature has provided an additional \$3.1 million in state funds. In addition, approximately \$1 million in federal funds is now available through the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. These monies have provided for an expansion in operating hours for all watercraft inspection stations, as well as the addition of three new checkstations to help address concerns of high risk watercraft entering Idaho from states with infested or suspect waterbodies. Finally, Idaho will operate some nighttime inspection hours during the 2017 season. Idaho is currently analyzing over 800 veliger samples each year from waterbodies across the state to ensure there are no current infestations.

Oregon

Beginning in 2009, through a new user fee to boaters, Oregon's Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) Prevention Program functions to keep Oregon's waters free of new aquatic invasive species and provide education on invasive species. The AIS Prevention Program is co-managed by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and Oregon State Marine Board. In the 2016 fiscal year, revenue generated from the AIS Prevention Permit totaled \$732,770. The AIS Prevention Program includes three full-time positions and 14 seasonal or partially funded positions. These funds also support law enforcement activities such as checking that boaters are carrying the AIS Prevention Permit and enforcing mandatory stops at five watercraft inspection stations. Watercraft Inspection Teams (WITs) are stationed along Oregon's eastern and southern borders. The five WITs conducted 16,825 watercraft inspections and 391 watercraft decontaminations, including 17 for quagga or zebra mussels. Overall boater inspection compliance rate in 2016 was 82 percent. Additionally, AIS Prevention Program staff members participated in public events, trainings or presentations for fishing groups, other agency staff, concerned citizens and school groups.

Wyoming

The Wyoming AIS program provides protection to all waters in Wyoming, including those managed by the Bureau of Reclamation and other DOI-managed waters. The Wyoming program focuses on outreach, watercraft inspections, and monitoring. Watercraft check stations are operated from late April through September each year at fourteen ports of entry and rest area locations near borders to intercept watercraft entering the state. Typically, over 40,000 inspections are conducted each year, with over 3,000 of those deemed high-risk because of previous use on a zebra/quagga mussel positive water, use in a mussel positive state with standing water on the watercraft, or for large and complex watercraft. Over 600 watercraft are decontaminated annually for standing water, motor flushes, and suspected mussels or other AIS. On average, ten watercraft are intercepted with mussels attached each year and are decontaminated and released. Since watercraft inspections began in 2010, over 290,000 inspections have been conducted, including 11,483 high risk inspections, 3,516 decontaminations, and 48 boats intercepted with mussels attached.

Ongoing outreach includes educating boaters on AIS prevention tips and inspection requirements through direct mail to boaters, one-on-one contacts during watercraft inspections, information in watercraft and fishing regulation booklets, and outreach events such as local fairs and celebrations.

Annually, over 65 waters are sampled for a variety of AIS, including zebra and quagga mussels. To date, no evidence of mussel larvae or adults has been detected in any Wyoming water. Waters with existing populations of AIS (Asian clam, New Zealand mudsnails, curly pondweed) are monitored annually to determine the extent of populations.

Montana

Since the detection of invasive mussel larvae in October 2016, Montana has dedicated increased funding and resources to prevent new introductions and contain positive and suspect water bodies from the threat of aquatic invasive species. Previously, Montana's program cost approximately \$1.6 million annually. The improved program will cost Montana \$5 million per year. In addition to increased staff and new equipment, program highlights include:

- Establishment of decontamination stations at Canyon Ferry and Tiber (impacted water bodies) to contain invasive mussel populations;
- Two-fold increase in state-operated watercraft inspection stations in addition to roving and fixed stations operated by partners such as the Blackfeet and CSKT tribes and Yellowstone and Glacier National Parks;
- Expansion in field sampling and monitoring capacity to more than 1,500 samples at more than 200 water bodies;
- Funding for increased education and outreach efforts to raise awareness and change behavior;
- Rapid response and preparedness training and planning;
- Establishment of the Upper Columbia Conservation tasked with developing an annual monitoring plan and planning and implementing a rapid response plan and related exercises for preparation of an invasive mussel detection in the Columbia River Basin;
- Mandatory inspections for vessel entering the state and for vessels heading westbound over the Continental Divide;
- Increased law enforcement and penalties for violating the Montana Invasive Species Act; and
- Grant funding to support locally-led AIS efforts and provide capacity for partnerships.

Colorado

The Colorado Aquatic Nuisance Species (ANS) Program was created in May 2008 in response to detections of juvenile (veliger) zebra and quagga mussels at Pueblo Reservoir. That same year, veligers were detected in seven other waters in the state, including the headwaters of the Colorado and Platte Rivers. There has never been an adult zebra or quagga mussel found in a Colorado water body. Since then, all waters in Colorado have been de-listed per the Western Regional Panel's (WRP's) Building Consensus guidelines. Colorado contributes their success to their mandatory watercraft inspection and decontamination (WID) requirements, rigorous sampling and monitoring, broad education and outreach, and strong leadership support.

Colorado stopped the continued inoculation of invasive mussels and other ANS into their state, resulting in them being the first state in the nation to reverse the trend of invasion through prevention efforts. Colorado inspects over 400,000 boats and decontaminates more than 15,000 boats a year. WID stations routinely intercept infested mussel boats from all across the nation.

The multi-jurisdictional program is based on scientific risk assessments and strong partnerships with governments, industry and non-governmental organizations. Through the WRP, Colorado modified their WID training curriculum and adapted their WID Data Sharing System for Western regional use.

The Program has been funded at \$4 million per year of severance tax with around \$1 million of incoming partner funds. Severance tax was severely impacted due to a 2016 State Supreme Court decision which resulted in program reductions in 2017. Colorado Parks and Wildlife is actively working with partners and elected officials to secure a long term sustainable source of funds to maintain the program in the future.

Governors' Requests of the Department of the Interior

In the interest of decreasing the movement of invasive quagga and zebra mussels between western water bodies, Western Governors make the following requests of DOI:

Request 1

Western Governors appreciate the significant efforts of Interior over the last three months to build a closer partnership between federal agencies and western states in addressing invasive mussels. Based on the progress made to date, Western Governors request that DOI work with western states to identify ways to halt the spread of invasive quagga and zebra mussels between western waterbodies. To this end, we request that DOI engage with WGA in an ongoing effort to identify resources, policy recommendations, and technical tools that states and federal agencies can use in efforts to combat aquatic invasive species in the West. These recommendations should be developed through a dialogue between WGA, DOI, and existing invasive species coordinating groups. These recommendations should be memorialized in a Memorandum of Understanding between Western Governors and DOI that will be presented during WGA's Winter Meeting in December 2017.

Request 2

Western Governors request that DOI, through the National Park Service (NPS) and other agencies, require the implementation of mandatory inspections and decontaminations of watercraft before leaving federal and inter-jurisdictional waters known to be infested with quagga and zebra mussels, including waters on the lower Colorado River. These inspections and decontaminations should be conducted by federal agency staff in accordance with the [Quagga-Zebra Mussel Action Plan for Western U.S. Water](#) (QZAP), and the [NPS's Quagga/Zebra Mussel Infestation Prevention and Response Planning Guide](#) (2007). The Bureau of Land Management should implement similar procedures for infested watercraft leaving federal system lands.

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Watercraft inspection and decontamination conducted by DOI agencies should follow the protocols found in the [Uniform Minimum Protocols and Standards for Watercraft Inspection and Decontamination Programs](#), and "[Student Training Curriculum for Watercraft Inspectors and Decontaminators to Prevent and Contain the Spread of Aquatic Invasive Species in the U.S.A.](#)" including "Clean, Drain, Dry." These standards were developed by the Western Regional Panel on Aquatic Nuisance Species and incorporated the input of western state agencies and aquatic invasive species coordinators. Relevant federal agency law enforcement personnel should enforce these standards for watercraft moving from infested waterbodies.

Governors also request that DOI commit to increase monitoring for aquatic invasive species, including quagga and zebra mussels, and relevant DOI agencies notify states of the movement of watercraft from infested federal and inter-jurisdictional waterbodies.

While Western Governors acknowledge and appreciate the inclusion of a \$4.5 million budget increase to fight invasive mussels in the West in the Bureau of Reclamation's FY18 proposed budget, the challenges and pressures of responding to invasive threats to the West's waterways cannot wait for another uncertain budget cycle to play out before resources are identified and committed. We look forward to your response and thank you for your engagement with western states on this important issue.

Respectfully,



Steve Bullock
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Chair, WGA



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