

Boaters can help fight spread of invasive mussels

By California Department of Fish and Wildlife

California agencies combating the spread of invasive quagga and zebra mussels remind boaters to remain cautious over Labor Day weekend.

Quagga and zebra mussels are invasive freshwater mussels native to Eurasia. They multiply quickly, encrust watercraft and infrastructure, alter water quality and the aquatic food web and ultimately impact native and sport fish communities. These mussels spread from one body of water to another by attaching to watercraft, equipment and nearly anything that has been in an infested waterbody.

Microscopic juveniles, invisible to the naked eye, are spread from infested waterbodies in water entrapped in boat engines, bilges, live-wells and buckets. Quagga mussels have infested 33 waterways in Southern California and zebra mussels have infested two waterways in San Benito County.

To prevent the spread of these mussels and other aquatic invasive species, people launching vessels at any body of water are subject to watercraft inspections and are strongly encouraged to clean, drain and dry their motorized and non-motorized boats, including personal watercraft, and any equipment that contacts the water before and after recreating.

It has been a great year to enjoy our lakes and rivers, and boaters are instrumental in protecting California's waters. As the season winds down, boaters should continue to clean, drain, and dry their watercraft after every outing to protect these cherished destinations for the future.

Take the following steps both before traveling to and before

leaving a waterbody to prevent spreading invasive mussels, improve your inspection experience and safeguard California waterways:

Clean – inspect exposed surfaces and remove all plants and organisms,

Drain – all water, including water contained in lower outboard units, live-wells and bait buckets, and

Dry – allow the watercraft to thoroughly dry between launches. Watercraft should be kept dry for at least five days in warm weather and up to 30 days in cool weather.

Travelers are also advised to be prepared for inspections at California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) Border Protection Stations. Over the past nine years, more than 1 million watercraft entering California have been inspected at the Border Protection Stations. Inspections, which can also be conducted by CDFW and California State Parks, include a check of boats and personal watercraft, as well as trailers and all onboard items. Contaminated vessels and equipment are subject to decontamination, rejection, quarantine or impoundment.

Quagga and zebra mussels can attach to and damage virtually any submerged surface. They can:

- Ruin a boat engine by blocking the cooling system and causing it to overheat
- Jam a boat's steering equipment, putting occupants and others at risk
- Require frequent scraping and repainting of boat hulls
- Colonize all underwater substrates such as boat ramps, docks, lines and other underwater surfaces, causing them to require constant cleaning
- Impose large expenses to owners.