

Minutes – AIS Prevention Planning Meeting

Convened by the Clearwater Resource Council
January 4, 2017 – The Hub in Seeley Lake, 1-4 pm

There were 28 people in attendance: 11 from local, state and federal agencies (MT FWP, MT DNRC, MISAC, MCWD); 5 from NGO's (Blackfoot Challenge, Big Blackfoot Chapter Trout Unlimited, Swan Valley Connections, Hanson Environmental); 12 community members.

Joann Wallenburn, Aquatics director for CRC, gave opening remarks about how she became involved in AIS monitoring, starting in 2009 at the Flathead Lake Biological Station where she first learned of the enormous threat posed by AIS. She recognized how harmful AIS could be to the Seeley Lake community. Personally, Joann inventoried area boat launches for AIS signage and provided signs to the appropriate agencies where signs were not present. In 2010, after retiring from the biostation, Joann trained as a boat inspector and gave presentations to lake homeowners associations. She recruited owners with docks to put PVC pipes off their docks to monitor for the invasive mussels. In 2011, CRC adopted the AIS program and the US Forest Service initiated funding through the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration program via Shane Hendrickson. Noxious weeds, including aquatic invasive weeds, were under the authority of Montana Department of Agriculture (MTDA). MTDA alone had the authority to run boat inspection stations, only in management areas and could only inspect for noxious weeds. MTDA couldn't check for 'critters' such as invasive mussels. There were check stations at Noxon Reservoir where there were noxious weeds. In 2011, all of Montana was declared a management area and MTDA set up a check station at Clearwater Junction. The 2011 legislature then assigned all authority to run check stations for both plants and animals to FWP, effective July 1. MTDA closed their operation on June 30. By end of July, Joann offered to come out of retirement to reopen the Clearwater Junction check station under FWP, teamed with the Swan Valley roving inspector, and it was up and running in August. From 2012 through now, the program has grown – more signage, more testing teams on each of the lakes done by CRC volunteers, samples submitted for microscopy for the veligers, and tests for eDNA at U of M labs, testing for both mussels and eurasian watermilfoil. All of the 2016 samples came back negative for AIS. Including \$8,000+ in-kind match of volunteer time and use of their boats, CRC is running a \$13,000 AIS monitoring program for \$5,000 in DNRC grant monies. US Forest Service funds pay for the eDNA tests.

Today, we need to look at the specific characteristics of our lakes, and discover what we need to do to keep the mussels from invading our waters. The state has their hands full to handle the known invaded waterbodies. This problem is too large and everyone must step up and contribute if we are to be successful in protecting our lakes.

Erik Hanson, previously the state's aquatic invasive species coordinator with MTDA, and currently an aquatic invasive species expert consultant from Hanson Environmental, presented his powerpoint detailing the initial introduction of invasive mussels into the US (1989) and their spread through the entire Mississippi River Basin (by 1994). It documented

the incredible costs of invasion to tourism dollars, increased power costs, cleanup costs, and more. With invasive mussel contamination in Tiber and Canyon Ferry Reservoirs, and also in Nelson Reservoir, it is inevitable they will spread to Fort Peck reservoir. Mr. Hanson expressed the need to do extensive inspections, and gave examples of somewhat successful prevention strategies. To clean mussels out of ballast, 10% bleach can be successful or water exceeding 120 degrees. What is most effective is stringent inspections, limiting or closing boat launches. There also needs to be a quicker turn-around for testing the samples, and the current level of sampling efforts is completely insufficient. For instance, Flathead Lake only does 10 samples – but needs to do 100+ and we also have to sample for eDNA.

Randy Arnold, FWP, Region 2 Supervisor and commander of Montana's Mussel Response Incident Command Team spoke next. Starting on October 17, the Bureau of Reclamation had their first sample come back positive in Tiber Reservoir, did manual inspections on the 'draw down' areas, and brought in mussel sniffing dogs. Although multiple dogs hit on the same locations, no adult mussels were found. Given multiple samples positive for veligers, they are operating on the assumption that there are adults in Tiber. At Canyon Ferry, there was one veliger found but the sample result could not be duplicated by a second lab as the sample had degraded, so the sample is considered 'suspect'. Dogs again indicated the presence of mussels, but no adult mussels were found. So Canyon Ferry is considered 'suspect', but realistically the Incident Team considers that there are adults in Canyon Ferry. FWP paired with DNRC's best folks to mobilize resources and create an incident command, bought additional equipment and rapidly increased their sampling.

The Incident Team is working to think outside the box in finding approaches and solutions. As a result, they brought in the nation's best experts on mussels – USGS, USFS, Idaho experts and hosted a one-day session in Helena answering immediate questions about control and containment. Addressing the need to have inspection and decontamination stations by 'ice out', our first deadline. At this point, Tiber and Canyon Ferry reservoir are shut down, primarily to catch people who had been moored on those reservoirs. (The Blackfeet Nation has also closed its waterbodies).

Mr. Arnold said let's look at two issues: **Control & Containment & Sampling and Monitoring.**

Control and Containment: start with not letting any boats on contaminated waters. If that doesn't work – mandatory de-contamination and addressing the cost of major decontamination efforts, such as fishing contests (which could absorb the entire state's AIS budget). They are still working through all the options – Canyon Ferry being the most difficult because of easy access to CF. Could require fewer designated put-in stations.

Sampling and Monitoring:

MT FWP had been operating on the assumption of prevention – certain check stations, some sampling. Now that has to change. Tiber could need a draw down to eradicate the mussels. Canyon Ferry will need a massive sampling effort, and more across the entire state. We need to look more carefully at how money is being spent, e.g is it cheaper to purchase more plankton nets than to spend the time to decontaminate nets.

With the new legislative session starting, the timing is right. So incident command has to also respond to budget preps and plans for a massive AIS plan. Also, the Incident Team can't wait until July 1 (the new fiscal year and biennium) to get started, so they suspended all community grants for now to centralize the funding, but those funds may also go back out to those groups who have capacity. One question is where would they put their funding right now? Hiring additional staff for check stations is also a challenge. Some check stations have not been staffed due to lack of applicants.

Shane Hendrickson asked don't we need an open checkbook – just like a fire event? The Incident Team, wanting to build an economic impact statement, approached Dept. of Commerce, who helped them paint a picture from other state's AIS economic impact statements, and the #'s were staggering. Mr. Arnold anticipates that the funding package out of the state legislature for AIS will be hefty, but at a cost to trade offs to other parts of the budget. But should Federal money be involved in this – just look at the dams that are federally owned. It seems very probable that mussels are spread by recreators. Hydroelectric companies are 'at the table' – and need to pay for their portion of this crisis.

The Group now broke into five groups according to particular lakes to answer two questions.

Question #1: Assuming unlimited funds, unlimited resources, and unlimited authority, what should we do to prevent the introduction of invasive mussels in our lakes?

Group A: Up more check stations & their hours. Should check stations also check boats & ballasts leaving our area? How could there be adequate enforcement, re: DOT.

Group B: Asks for a designated check point at each end of the valley – we have that advantage. How could we enforce – a fine of \$500? Idaho's fine could be \$3,000 – or confiscate the boat?

Group C: Put together a massive media and education campaign that extends to the public and a lot of signage indicating check stations. Have a series of signs warning boaters before check stations. Should we track anglers versus recreationalists – for big fishing events, can we track where boats have been decontaminated and mark them visibly so they are more easily monitored by FWP?

Group D: 1) Mandatory inspections for all watercraft on all Mt. Roadways w/proof of inspection, 2) Mandatory inspection and proof (tagged) for all boats coming from out-of-state, 3) a substantial deterrent for people dodging check stations. And need more overall education for AIS beyond powerboats – kayaks, canoes, etc.

Group E: Same as above – mimic how education has occurred re: fire prevention. And emphasize how much an AIS invasion will cost in the future re: agriculture, tourism, etc. Active education, perhaps requiring people to attend a class in order to qualify for a permit. More education in Public Schools.

General discussion:

Like the Ebola virus, this is once you got it – you got it. A lot of diseases have been picked up

by fluorescent anti-body DNA testing – a pharmacy school could develop this – this has been successful in the medical field for first-level screening. Also, faster turnaround for testing, and more eDNA testing which is highly accurate. Upon a positive result, immediate quarantine.

Joann mentioned that this is the 3-year interval in FWP for boat decal renewals, could include AIS literature. Erik mentioned that it is very difficult to 100% decontaminate a boat. At an inspection, Erik would say quarantine for 30 days. For instance, in BC, a boat that has been in a mussel-infected area you're not allowed in for 30 days. We need a plethora of mussel-detecting dogs.

Question #2: Specifically for each lake, what actions should be taken to prevent the introduction of invasive mussels? For each action, identify what funding, resources or authority would be needed.

Big Sky Lake: which is a gated community, only home-owners can launch, and they have a wash station at the boat launch. BSL would increase the # of samples on the lake and do a horizontal tow.

Placid & Salmon Lake:

Echoing the other approaches. Funding – perhaps a small fee for all lake-users, or creating a water-quality district. Dedicated funding from the legislature – like a noxious weed trust fund. More people need to understand the severity of the problem. Joann mentioned how proactive a group called the Swan Lakers have been on Swan Lake to get trained and inspect watercraft on Swan Lake. Need more personal outreach to home owners associations. Rachel mentioned that it might take shock value for people who resist 'regulation' and limitations on their activity – so the approach to public outreach needs to be difficult.

Inez and Alva:

To protect Inez and Alva – we need to establish a check point to the north of these lakes. Also, need a wash point at the boat launch. Need an ambitious sampling system.

Seeley Lake:

Ladd reported that there are so many points of egress, plus many private landowners have their own boat launches.

Laurie Page suggested an incentive for going through checks – upgrade the raffle offered now. Get a chance on a boat trip. Make it “Cool to be Clean”. Katie Knotek mentioned maybe a discount on another fee?

Lindbergh Lake:

Need to figure out a way to educate homeowners. Maybe there would be a process for homeowners to be certified that keep their craft on the lake and go to no other. A separate process for guests. It can be a positive thing – we are at the headwaters of the Columbia River Basin – so that can be an advantage for PR, and potential lake cleanliness.

Erik said that inflatable watercraft are low risk, but kayaks and canoes that can hold water do pose a risk. Rachel highlighted the need for governmental agencies to work together across

county and agency lines and boundaries.

Where do we go next?

We need to realize we have a lot of volunteer capacity, so we can offer a big match to outside agency funding (for instance, \$5,000 of agency money leveraged \$8800 of volunteer \$)

We need to involve youth, create Lake Homeowner Association networks.

CRC Seeley Lake Area AIS Prevention Meeting: Flipchart Notes and Consensograms

Attendance: 28 + 3 CRC staff

Red (Agency): 11

Yellow (NGO): 5

Green (Citizen): 12 (1 didn't sign in and didn't receive dots)

Pre-meeting consensograms: (my monitor reported that agency folks were reluctant to vote as they wanted to see how non-agency people felt – commendable!)

Scale Definition:

1: Absolutely NOT OK

2: Mostly not OK

3: 50:50, so-so

4: Mostly OK

5: Completely A-OK

- Should the Clearwater Junction boat-check station be open (pick one date range and one time range)
 - Date range
 - Mem'l Day to Labor Day: 0
 - March to October: 0
 - Ice-off to ice-on
 - Green: 9
 - Yellow: 4
 - Red: 6
 - Time range
 - 7 AM to 7 PM: 0
 - Sunrise to Sunset:
 - Green: 3
 - Red: 3
 - 24/7
 - Green: 2
 - Yellow: 3
 - Red: 2
- On a scale of 1 to 5, how do you feel about charging a boat sticker fee to help pay for AIS costs?
 - 50/50
 - Red: 1
 - Mostly OK:
 - Green: 1
 - Red: 1
 - A-OK
 - Green: 8
 - Yellow: 4
 - Red: 5
- On a scale of 1 to 5, how do you feel about letting uninspected boats use our lakes?
 - NOT OK

- Green: 9
- Yellow: 4
- Red: 4
- Mostly not OK
 - Red: 2

Late meeting consensograms: all blue dots, 'anonymous' (many had already left)

- On a scale of 1 to 5, how do you feel about allowing float planes to use Seeley Lake?
 - Not OK: 3
 - Mostly Not OK: 4
 - 50/50: 11
- On a scale of 1 to 5, how do you feel about requiring all boats to be inspected before launching in our lakes/
 - Mostly OK: 1
 - A-OK: 17
- On a scale of 1 to 5, how do you feel about requiring ballast boats to be decontaminated before using our lakes?
 - A-OK: 18

Break-out Session: (5 groups of up to 6 participants)

Discussion question #1: Given unlimited funding, unlimited resources, and unlimited authority, what should we do to prevent the introduction of invasive mussels in our lakes?

- Mandatory inspection of ALL watercraft and proof of inspection
- All boats coming into the state must be stopped and inspected
- Adequate enforcement and fines
- Point out economic impact
- Include education material with 2017 boat decal
- AIS education program in schools; educate the kids, they'll educate the parents
- Faster turn-around on testing, to achieve early detection
- Create on-site immediate test for presence/absence of invasive mussels
- Immediate quarantine of lake upon suspicious or positive test result
- 30 day quarantine of boat coming from mussel-fouled waters
- Increase hours and number of check stations
- Check boats leaving the watershed, too (boats heading south on Hwy 83)
- Coordinate with DOT for enforcement
- 24/7 check points at the north and south ends of the valley
- Fine (significant) for noncompliance
- Massive media and education campaign
- Track anglers v recreation
- Proof of inspection/decontamination
- Provide voluntary decontamination (for a fee) capability
- Train more puppies (mussel-sniffing dogs)

Discussion question #2: Specifically for [your group's assigned] lake(s), what actions should be taken to prevent the introduction of invasive mussels? For each action, identify what funding, resources, authority or legislative action would be needed. N.B. we didn't have time to get into the funding, resources, etc. weeds.

- Placid and Salmon Lakes
 - Funding – fee for anglers, paddlers, etc.
 - Create a water quality district
 - Ask legislature for more funding
 - Outreach: change approach
 - Make people GET IT!!!
- Lakes Inez and Alva
 - Establish a WIS for boats coming down Hwy 83 from the north
 - Boat washes at boat ramps
 - Upgrade testing systems
 - Develop response plan for neighbor contamination
- Big Sky
 - Increase number of sampling locations
 - Improve towing measures (plankton net tows)
- Lindbergh (Flathead/Swan Basin)
 - Educate homeowners of property value impacts
 - Tiered permit system
 - Summer-long residence/mooring
 - Day use
 - Checkpoints per basin system/points of access
- Seeley Lake
 - Recognize # of private ramps and points of access
 - Use GPS locators on boats to identify boats that traveled to fouled waters
 - Incentive for inspection e.g. raffle (already in place)
 - Create messaging that it's "Cool to be Clean" rather than "Bad to be Dirty"

What's Next?

- Take advantage of legislative session
- Don't allow Incident Team to operate in a vacuum
- Continue volunteer effort and recruitment
- Involve youth
- Create lake landowner networks