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Boater Does the Right Thing

*Cleaning, draining and drying his boat keeps
zebra mussels out of Flaming Gorge*

Dutch John -- An incident at Flaming Gorge Reservoir shows that quagga and zebra mussels can come to Utah from almost anywhere.

It also shows that cleaning, draining and drying your boat are the key to keeping mussels out of Utah.

Dead mussels

On the morning of June 4, a mechanic working on the lower unit of a boat in dry storage at the reservoir in northeastern Utah saw something that didn't look right. His manager reported his find to Division of Wildlife Resources technicians who were monitoring boats at a nearby launch ramp.

As the technicians probed the 31-foot boat, they were amazed at what they saw. Dead zebra mussels were on the underside of the boat's lower unit, inside the motor itself and deep within the boat's driveline.

Fortunately, the man who bought the boat did everything right. After buying the boat in October 2007, he had it cleaned three times before placing it on Flaming Gorge on May 25.

Before he bought it, the boat sat in Wabasha Marina in Minnesota for about four to five months. The buyer knew about the zebra mussel threat in the mid-West. After he bought the boat, he had it professionally cleaned with a pressure washer and an acid wash. Once the boat was in his possession, he had it pressure washed again.

The steps he took to clean the heavily infested boat, and the time the boat spent in dry storage, were enough to kill the zebra mussels before the boat was placed on Flaming Gorge on May 25.

The DWR technicians who examined the boat were amazed at the number of dead mussels they found inside it.

"As our investigation continued, we noticed thousands of byssel threads attached to the transom area where shells had been scraped off by hand," says Natalie Muth, regional aquatic invasive species biologist for the DWR. "This leads us to believe that this boat was heavily infested with mussels when it was removed from the water in Minnesota."

Lessons learned

This incident teaches two important lessons about quagga and zebra mussels:

- If you buy a boat from a state other than Utah, be sure to check it carefully for aquatic invasive species. This is especially important if the boat has sat in the water for an extended period of time.

"It's extremely important to learn about the waters the boat has been moored in," Muth says. "If you buy a boat that's been exposed to quagga or zebra mussels, you run two risks: you can transport the mussels to Utah, and you can end up buying

a damaged boat. Quagga and zebra mussels can ruin a boat's engine, its cooling intakes, air conditioning units and numerous other systems."

- Lake Mead isn't the only out-of-state water that poses a threat to Utah. And Lake Powell isn't the only lake in Utah that's at risk of getting mussels. Boats with mussels on them can come from anywhere. And they can end up at any Utah lake!

For example, Interstate 80 provides a direct line to the northeastern and northern regions of Utah. Boats from all over the country visit Flaming Gorge Reservoir and other waters in Utah. It takes only one boat with adult mussels attached to it, or a bilge full of veligers [juvenile mussels], to infest an entire lake.

Clean, drain and dry

By doing just what this boater did, you can help keep quagga and zebra mussels out of Utah.

The key is to **clean, drain** and **dry** your boat and any other equipment that touches the water:

- **Clean** plants, fish, mussels and mud from your boat;
- **Drain** the water from all areas of your boat and equipment;
- **Dry** your boat and equipment in the sun before using it again. In the summer, let it dry for at least 7 days in the sun. In the spring and fall, dry it for 18 days in the sun. In the winter, leave your equipment out for 3 days in the freezing temperatures. Leaving it out for 3 days should be enough to kill any mussels that are on your equipment.

You can also have a professional boat washer wash your boat and trailer, and flush your motor, bilge and live wells, with scalding hot water.

The water must be at least 140 degrees Fahrenheit. Unfortunately, there are very few boat washers in Utah that have equipment that can heat water to 140 degrees. But the DWR does have 26 decontamination units that can heat water that to 140 degrees. Most of these units are located at Utah state parks that have a reservoir or a lake.

"Cleaning, draining and drying your boat and equipment is something all of us can do," says Larry Dalton, aquatic invasive species coordinator for the DWR.

"Drying your boat and equipment is just as effective as washing it with water that's 140 degrees."