



Oregon Water Resources Congress

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April 15, 2025

Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Wildfire
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court St. NE,
Salem Oregon 97301

RE: Testimony in Support of HB 2170A

Dear Chair Golden, Vice-Chair Nash, Senator Girod, Senator Prozanski, and Senator Taylor:

The Oregon Water Resources Congress (OWRC) is providing testimony in support of HB 2170A, which will provide opportunities for irrigation districts and other government entities to voluntarily partner with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and other applicable agencies in operating boat inspection stations. Increasing the number of boat inspection stations in Oregon is crucial to detecting and preventing the spread of aquatic invasive species, particularly Quagga and zebra freshwater mussels.

OWRC is a nonprofit trade association representing irrigation districts, water control districts, drainage districts, water improvement districts, and other local government entities delivering agricultural water supplies throughout Oregon. These water stewards operate complex water management systems, including water supply reservoirs, canals, pipelines, and hydropower facilities. OWRC members deliver water to approximately 600,000 acres of farmland in Oregon, which is over one-third of all the irrigated land in the state. Some of our members operate reservoirs with boat access that are susceptible to aquatic invasive species, and virtually all depend on water supplies and infrastructure that is vulnerable if Oregon is invaded by voracious species of mussels.

Aquatic invasive species are a threat to Oregon lakes, rivers, streams, and other waterbodies, including reservoirs and other constructed water infrastructure. Under ORS 830.587, this includes aquatic species of wildlife, freshwater or marine invertebrate, and aquatic noxious weeds identified as a prohibited species by rule. "Quagga and zebra mussels...are among the top species of concern, due to their destructive nature and ease of translocation by watercraft."¹ These freshwater mussels can attach to hard surfaces, such as boats and water pipes, can survive outside of water for several days, and reproduce rapidly. Infestations lead to severe economic and environmental damage as infrastructure becomes encrusted, water pipes clogged, beaches/shores made unwalkable from the sharp shells, and native species imperiled by lack of food or changes in water quality.

In response to the threat of these invasive species, the Oregon Legislature created Oregon's Aquatic Invasive Species Prevention Program in 2009 (HB 2220). This program is designed to prevent the introduction of new aquatic invasive species and limit the spread of existing species in waterways around Oregon. The program is funded by a Waterway Access or Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) permit purchased by boaters using specified watercraft.

¹ *Oregon's Aquatic Invasive Species Prevention Program 2022 Legislative Report*, submitted February 2023.
<https://www.oregon.gov/osmb/boater-info/Documents/AIS/AISPP2022AnnualReport.pdf>

The threat of aquatic invasive species, specifically invasive mussels, has recently increased since Quagga mussels were found in the Snake River in Idaho in 2023 and 2024. As a response to this and other mussel discoveries, a Bi-State Work Group between Oregon and Washington was convened in the fall of 2024 to discuss near-term strategies and partnerships to prevent these destructive species from entering Oregon and Washington waterways. One of the recommendations from the recently released report² is to increase boat inspection stations, including creating “additional mandatory check stations at strategic locations,” and partnering “with tribal and local governments and industry partners, to increase inspection,” similar to what is proposed in HB 2170A.

One of the best ways to prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species is to inspect watercraft and provide for decontamination when needed. Currently, the authority to operate boat inspection stations is limited to the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), State Marine Board, and the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA). There are currently only five watercraft (boat) inspection stations statewide, some of which are only open part of the year, which is woefully insufficient to find and prevent invasive species from entering Oregon. Funding for the AIS programs is limited and makes staffing existing stations difficult.

To help increase aquatic invasive species prevention efforts, HB 2170A would amend ORS 830.589 to allow irrigation districts and local government entities to voluntarily partner with ODFW (or Marine Board or ODA) to staff and operate watercraft inspection stations near waterways of concern, specifically reservoirs with recreational and commercial boat access. This would allow districts to require boats to stop at authorized inspection stations and to require (or perform) decontamination when invasive aquatic species are present. These stations would operate in the same manner as existing stations, including staff training and applicable decontamination procedures.

Irrigation districts are seeking to voluntarily partner with state agencies on boat inspection stations solely out of necessity. If these aquatic invaders take hold in a reservoir or other waterway, they will quickly reproduce, clog infrastructure, and impacted irrigation districts would be unable to deliver water to the farms and ranchers they serve, leading to additional negative impacts to agriculture, the economy, and local communities. The potential for severe and catastrophic damage on water infrastructure from invasive mussels outweighs concerns about the additional cost and responsibility associated with operating boat inspection stations. Some areas are more susceptible than others, with factors such as temperature and habitat suitability for invasive species to survive, but also the remoteness of reservoirs with recreational access, number of out-of-state visitors, and distance to existing boat inspection stations. Without additional boat inspection stations and increased public awareness about the threat that invasive species poses, Oregon is at high risk for devastating economic and environmental damage.

HB 2170A is necessary to allow other government entities to voluntarily partner with state agencies in operating boat inspection stations, which will support statewide efforts to prevent mussels and other aquatic invasive species from entering our waterways. We urge you to pass HB 2170A and help prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species in Oregon. Thank you for your consideration of our testimony.

Sincerely,
April Snell
Executive Director

² *Oregon and Washington Invasive Mussel Near-Term Action Working Group: Findings and Near-Term Action Recommendations Report*, released January 14, 2025. <https://wdfw.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2025-01/oregon-washington-invasive-mussel-findings-and-near-term-action-recommendations.pdf>