

Oregon's Aquatic Invasive Species Prevention Program 2023 Legislative Report



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(Cover Photo: Watercraft was intercepted with Quagga Mussels at the Ontario Watercraft Inspection Station from Lake Havasu, AZ and decontaminated by Nathan Richey)

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Executive Summary

In 2009, the Oregon Legislature passed House Bill 2220 that created the Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) Prevention Program and established a new user fee for boaters (AIS Prevention Permit), which funds the AIS Prevention Program. The September 2023 discovery of quagga mussel veligers in the Snake River below Twin Falls, Idaho emphasizes the importance of the AIS Prevention Program to help protect Oregon's waters from the introduction of aquatic invasive species and limit the spread of existing aquatic invasive species. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) and Oregon State Marine Board (OSMB) are partners in managing the AIS Prevention Program. Watercraft inspection staff activities are managed by ODFW. Administration of the AIS Prevention Permit and law enforcement coordination are managed by OSMB.

ODFW operated five watercraft inspection stations located near Oregon's southern, eastern, and northern borders. Ashland and Ontario watercraft inspection stations operated year-round. The Klamath Falls station opened in May and closed in mid-September, the Brookings station opened in June and closed in September, and the Umatilla station opened in June and closed in October. This year, the AIS program also added a two-person Roving Team based in Salem. The Roving Team's original objective was to conduct AIS outreach and education activities at various boat ramps around the state, including the State Fair, but due to staffing issues, the team focused instead on filling staffing gaps at the Ontario inspection station. All motorized and non-motorized boats (canoes, kayaks, rafts, etc.) regardless of size are required to stop at inspection stations. In 2023, five stations conducted 16,428 watercraft inspections and 336 watercraft decontaminations, which included nine for quagga or zebra mussels (*Dreissena rostriformis bugensis*, *D. polymorpha*, respectively).

In the 2023 fiscal year, revenue generated from AIS Prevention Permit totaled \$926,296. The AIS Prevention Program provided (either partial or full) funding for seven full-time positions, and ten seasonal or part-time positions. Additionally, these funds supported law enforcement activities such as checking boaters for a current AIS or the Waterway Access Permit and enforcing mandatory stops at watercraft inspection stations. State and county law enforcement officers issued 2,171 warnings and 218 citations for failure to possess an AIS or a Waterway Access Permit and 56 warnings and nine citations for failure to stop at a watercraft inspection station.

The program received additional funding from the US Army Corps of Engineers as part of the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA). This grant provided \$616,352 over 18 months and was used to help fund additional inspectors and hours of operation at the inspection stations.

During 2023, the watercraft inspection program faced several challenges including intermittent closures of some inspection stations due to unhealthy air quality and road closures from wildfires, low water levels at several lake and reservoirs, and difficulty hiring staff at several stations.

Background

In response to the growing threat of an infestation from dreissenid mussels, the 2009 Oregon Legislature approved an AIS Prevention Program. A new user fee (AIS Prevention Permit) was established for owners of non-motorized watercraft ≥ 10 feet in length and motorized watercraft. Funds generated from the AIS Prevention Permit are used to fund ODFW and OSMB staff, ODFW watercraft inspectors and supplies, outreach and education materials, and other AIS related activities. For more detailed information about the AIS Prevention Program, please refer to www.odfw.com or www.oregon.gov/OSMB.

The goal of the AIS Prevention Program is to prevent new introductions of aquatic invasive species and limit the spread of existing ones. Quagga and zebra mussels and hydrilla (*Hydrilla verticillata*) are among the top species of concern, due to their destructive nature and ease of translocation by watercraft. Quagga and zebra mussel populations have spread rapidly in the United States (Figure 1) due their adaptability, lack of natural predators and ease of physical transport. Species like Eurasian watermilfoil (*Myriophyllum spicatum*) and New Zealand mudsnails (*Potamopyrgus antipodarum*) already contaminate some Oregon waterbodies. For more information about these and other aquatic invasive species, please visit: USGS Non-Indigenous Aquatic Species.

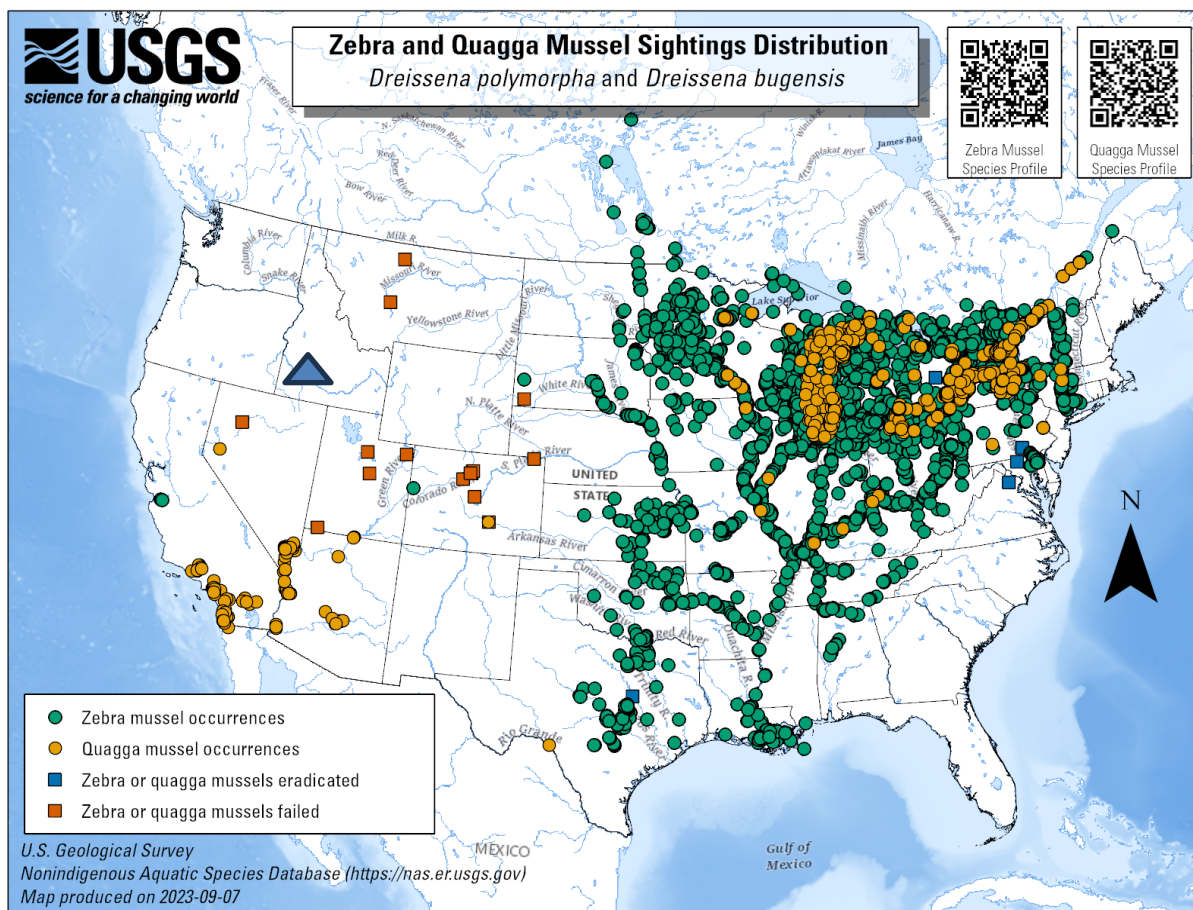


Figure 1. Current zebra and quagga mussel distribution in the United States. Map provided by US Geological Survey Non-Indigenous Species Database September 7, 2023. The Idaho quagga mussel discovered in the middle Snake River in September is added to the map.

Program Activities

ODFW has the primary responsibility of operating watercraft inspection stations. ODFW technicians are trained in inspection and decontamination protocols set by “[*Uniform Minimum Protocols and Standards for Watercraft Inspection and Decontamination Programs for Dreissenid Mussels in the Western United States IV*](#).” All technicians complete *Level I – Watercraft Inspection Training* and *Level II – Decontamination Training*. Technicians are assigned across five stations (Table 1).

The AIS program coordinators (ODFW and OSMB) are stationed in Salem. These positions have a variety of duties, including:

- Training, Watercraft Inspection Team (WIT) on procedures and protocols (watercraft inspection and decontamination, data collection and entry and interpersonal communications)
- Providing AIS training opportunities to other agencies, schools, fishing groups, boating clubs, volunteers and concerned citizens
- Developing, purchasing, and disseminating invasive species educational material (fact sheets, brochures, signs, risk assessments, etc.)
- Conducting watercraft inspections and decontaminations
- Aiding during eradication and control efforts
- Responding to public inquiries and sightings
- Surveying and collecting aquatic invasive species
- Staffing booths at public events
- Selling, processing and oversight of permit sales
- Providing updates to the Oregon Legislature
- Contracting and managing interagency agreements
- Serving as members of:
 - Oregon Invasive Species Council, 100th Meridian Columbia River Basin Team, Western Regional Panel for Aquatic Invasive Species, Western Invasive Species Coordinator Effort, Building Consensus in the West, American Boat and Yacht Council

Inspections and Compliance

In 2023, ODFW completed 16,428 watercraft inspections (Table 1). Watercraft inspected included boats from 48 US states, seven Canadian provinces and one US territory. Salem staff performed one additional special inspection. In addition to watercraft inspections and decontaminations, our WIT track watercraft inspection compliance. Inspectors record the number watercraft that bypass an inspection station, time of day, number of watercraft and watercraft type. We compared the number of bypassed watercrafts to the number of inspections each day to get an estimate of watercraft inspection compliance rate. While compliance rates vary between stations, overall compliance was 74.8%.

Table 1. Summary of ODFW’s watercraft inspection station information for 2023.

Station	Number of inspectors	Inspection dates	Inspections (N)	Intercepted watercraft with biofouling	Compliance rate (%)
Ashland	4	Year-round	6,879	79	90%
Klamath Falls	2	5/9 – 9/12	1,681	5	63%
Brookings	1	6/10 – 9/29	1,175	33	76%
Ontario	5	Year-round	4,521	184	75%
Umatilla	2	6/20 -10/25	2,172	35	70%
Roving (Salem)	2	6/1 - 9/15			
Total	16		16,428	336	Avg. 74.8%

Decontaminations

During the inspection process, if an inspector observes a vessel to be contaminated with any aquatic invasive species, a decontamination is immediately performed on-site. Three hundred and thirty-six of the vessels inspected were contaminated with aquatic vegetation, marine or freshwater organisms, or other biofoulings. We were able to perform a simple decontamination on these vessels. Nine vessels were contaminated with quagga or zebra mussels, and we performed a full decontamination (hand removal, followed by hot water high-pressure) on-site (Figure 2 and 3). These vessels originated from Arizona, Nevada, and Texas. If the vessel was remaining in Oregon, a follow-up inspection/decontamination was performed at the owner’s residence before the vessel was launched, or if the watercraft was going to another state, that other state was notified, and another inspection may have been performed.



Figure 2 and 3. Boat intercepted at the ODFW’s watercraft inspection stations. Boat was inspected and quagga mussels found. ODFW decontaminated the boat on-site and re-inspected with no additional mussels found.

Outreach and Education

Education and outreach are key components of the AIS Prevention Program. Outreach occurs at the inspection stations, special events and requested trainings. These contacts enable face-to-face

opportunities to explain the program, its benefits and the impacts of invasive species in Oregon. Additionally, ODFW and OSMB provided printed materials at all inspection stations, AIS trainings, public meetings, and special events.

Since 2009, the AIS Prevention Program has offered a special training course to the public and government agencies upon request. Level I – Watercraft Inspection Training is a half-day class based on the 100th Meridian Initiative curriculum. The Level I instructors teach basic AIS biology and behavior and explain Oregon laws and regulations associated with the AIS Prevention Program. All ODFW and OSMB Level I instructors have completed the 100th Meridian Initiative Level I and Level II – Watercraft Inspection trainings.

In 2023, the AIS Prevention Program provided information to a variety of Oregonians, including:

- Bureau of Land Management
- Other ODFW programs
- US Forest Service
- Mt Hood Community College
- Portland State University
- Marine Law Enforcement Training Academy
- Umpqua Basin Hydrologist monthly meeting (virtual)
- Ontario Trunk & Treat
- Treasure Valley Community College

WRDA Funds

As part of the Water Resources Development Act, the program received \$616,352 in federal funds from the US Army Corps of Engineers. These federal grant monies are designated for protection of the Columbia River Basin against aquatic invasive species and require matching funds; therefore, we used AIS Prevention Permit revenue as match. During 2023, we used this grant money to fund additional watercraft inspectors and increase hours of operation. Beyond June 30, 2024, the expectation is that the program will receive this funding. If not, we would seek other grant monies or consider staff reductions.

Aquatic Invasive Species Prevention Permit

OSMB has the lead role in implementing the AIS Permit Program. This permit program is the funding mechanism that supports activities outlined in this report. The OSMB distributes funds to ODFW, law enforcement agencies, and other partners via intergovernmental agreements and contracts for services. Permit revenues are deposited into a dedicated AIS Prevention Fund maintained by the OSMB.

Permit requirements vary for different types of watercrafts. Oregon-registered motorized watercraft owners pay \$5 fee every two years when they renew their registration. Current registration decals serve as proof of payment into the AIS Prevention Program. Owners of out-of-state motorized watercraft must purchase a non-resident motorized AIS Permit (\$20 yearly) prior to boating in Oregon waters. Operators of all non-motorized watercraft 10 feet or longer in length (regardless of residency) must possess a [Waterway Access Permit](#) (\$17 yearly). This permit for non-motorized watercraft includes payment into the AIS Prevention Fund. Out-of-state motorized AIS Permits and Waterway Access Permits are transferable to other watercraft within their respective categories. Discounted permits are available through OSMB for businesses that rent watercraft (liveries), and river guides using non-motorized watercraft are offered permits at a discounted price through the OSMB.

Waterway Access Permits and out-of-state motorized AIS Permits are available for purchase online at [OSMB](#) and [ODFW](#) websites, in-person at OSMB headquarters, and anywhere that sells Oregon hunting/fishing licenses.

Program Financial Statement

During the 2023 fiscal year, revenue collected from permit sales totaled \$926,296. Oregon motorized permit revenue from boater registrations was \$335,410; Waterway Access Permit for non-motorized watercraft \$465,646; out-of-state motorized \$119,000; liveries and guides \$6,240 (Figure 4). This revenue amount is the second highest to be collected during the past five years. However, long term results show that the program has remained stable over time with small increases and decreases from fiscal year to fiscal year.

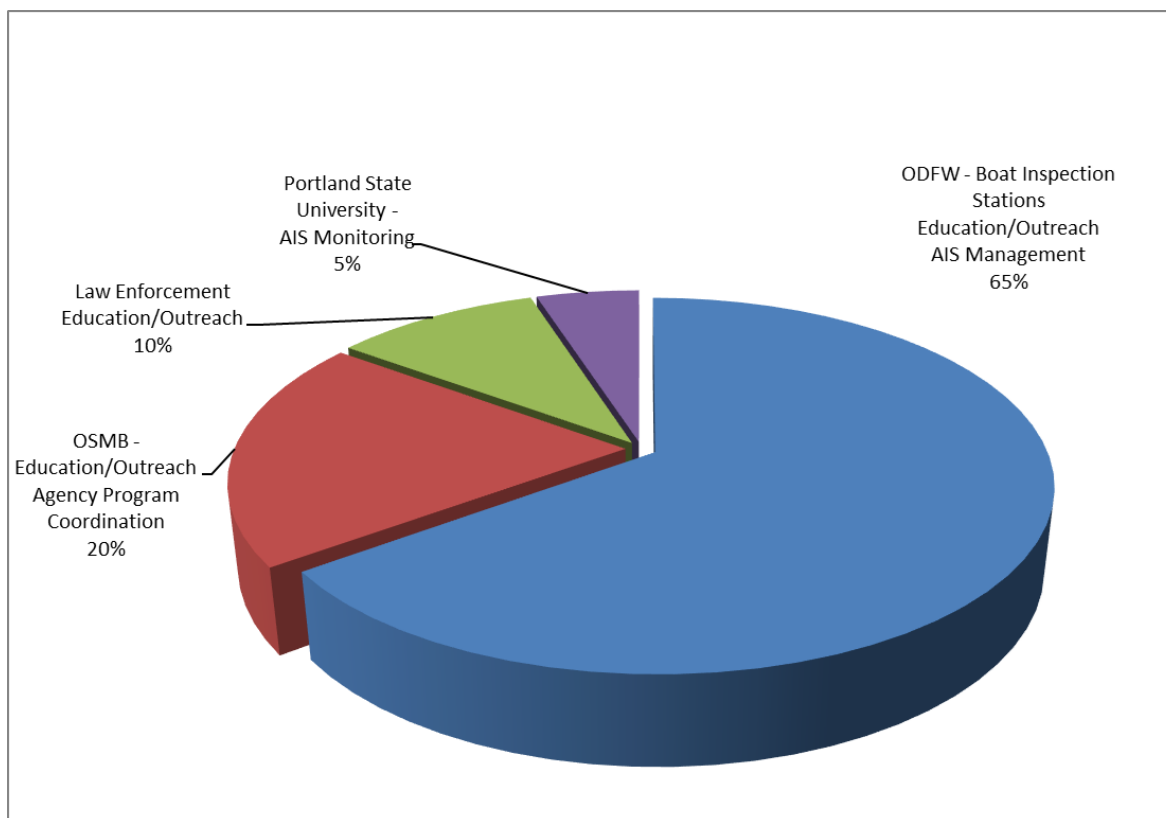


Figure 4. Allocation of Aquatic Invasive Species Prevention Program funds for fiscal 2023-year Oregon State Marine Board (OSMB) and Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife (ODFW).

Law Enforcement Activities

Law enforcement officers (LEO) (County Marine Patrol Deputies and the Oregon State Police Fish and Wildlife Troopers) conducted on-water-patrols and interact with the boating public. When a LEO contacts boaters on the water or at boat access sites, they enforce boating laws, perform safety checks, and respond to questions from the public about the AIS Prevention Program. The OSMB provides yearly trainings and program updates to LEO. During 2023, officers documented contacts with 39,599 boaters.

The LEO are encouraged to focus on education rather than issuing citations to boaters that lack an AIS Prevention Permit or fail to stop at watercraft inspection stations. In 2023, LEO issued 218 citations and 2,171 warnings for failure to possess an AIS Permit. Additionally, 56 warnings

and 9 citations were issued for failure to stop at a watercraft inspection station. Law enforcement will continue focusing on permit and inspection compliance during targeted time periods.

Acknowledgements

ODFW would like to thank many folks for a successful inspection season. First thank you to our AIS technicians: **Ashland:** Tim Bower, Wyatt Inman, Morah West, Chris Shelton and Nathan Richey (Sr. Tech.); **Klamath Falls:** Stephanie Cole and Kelsey Heida; **Brookings:** Robert Minter; **Ontario:** Beck Harper, Libby Adam, and Tara Keuter; **Umatilla:** Ashlanne Sparks and Delaja Pena; **Roving Team:** Sierra Zambrano and Sarah Beggs. Thank you to ODFW district, wildlife area and hatchery staff for providing guidance and assistance throughout the season. Thanks to ODOT for allowing inspection stations at the Ashland and Umatilla Ports-of-Entry. Thanks to Oregon Travel Experience in Ontario and Klamath Falls for granting us permission to set up inspection stations.



Libby Adams and Beck Harper ready for action at the Ontario Watercraft Inspection Station.

The Oregon State Marine Board would like to thank the Oregon Invasive Species Council and its members for their continued support and guidance for implementing this AIS Prevention Program. Also, a huge thank you to our Law Enforcement partners as their support and work within this program are vital to its success.