

The Washington Invasive Species Council thanks Governor Chris Gregoire for her instrumental role in the Premier's signing of the Columbia River Rapid Response Plan. We greatly appreciate her dedication to the issue of invasive species and support of the council.



NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Environment

PROVINCE JOINS BATTLE AGAINST INVASIVE MUSSELS

VICTORIA – B.C is joining the state governments of Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Montana, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission in an agreement to protect the Columbia River basin from the spread of destructive zebra and quagga mussels, Environment Minister Barry Penner said today.

“Zebra and quagga mussels don’t respect international, state or provincial borders and pose a major threat to the B.C. environment,” said Penner. “By signing on to the Columbia Basin Rapid Response Plan, we will now be informed immediately if a population of these mussels is detected within the Columbia River basin, and we will gain access to a high level of scientific and operational expertise in dealing with aquatic invasive species.”

Zebra and quagga mussels are two freshwater molluscs native to Eastern Europe that were introduced to the Great Lakes in the 1980s. Over the past couple of decades, the invasive molluscs have spread to eastern Canada, the eastern United States and most recently, the western U.S. They spread rapidly due to their strong reproductive capacity and their ability to attach themselves to boats navigating or being transported from infested waters by trailer. Zebra and quagga mussels are not currently present in B.C. waters, but they have been found on intercepted trailered boats enroute to B.C.

The spread of zebra and quagga mussels into B.C. waters would have a severe environmental impact. Both species can completely replace native mussels and cause a collapse of the natural food chain, threatening local fish species, particularly salmon and trout. Industrial, agricultural and recreational uses of infested areas would be affected.

“With the participation of British Columbia, the vast majority of the Columbia River basin is now thoroughly engaged in the Rapid Response Plan,” said Robyn Thorson, director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Pacific Region. “By working together and taking a proactive regional approach we are better prepared to face future invasive species threats and protect our environmental and economic resources.”

The mussels also pose significant economic risks in the damage they can do to hydropower systems as colonies can attach themselves to submerged components including fish passage facilities, raw water distribution systems for turbine cooling and drains. A recent survey estimates an impact of \$268 million to power plant and drinking water facilities in the eastern U.S. from 1989 to 2004.

The Columbia Basin Rapid Response Plan will co-ordinate a rapid, effective and efficient response between state, provincial and federal agencies in order to identify, contain and when feasible, eradicate zebra and quagga mussel populations, if they are introduced in the waters of the Columbia River basin. Prevention is the first priority and this includes preventing contaminated watercraft from entering uncontaminated waters.

There is an important role for the public in the battle against invasive mussels. Anglers and recreational boaters transporting their boats by trailer into B.C. from other provinces and states should ensure they have thoroughly cleaned their boats and equipment to remove any visible mud, plants, fish or animals. Further information on how to prevent the spread of zebra and quagga mussels can be found at www.protectyourwaters.net.

The Columbia River basin covers more than 673,390 square kilometres spread over southeastern British Columbia, most of Washington state, Idaho and Oregon, and parts of Montana, Nevada, Utah and Wyoming.

The Rapid Response Plan was prepared in 2008 with funding support from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the Bonneville Power Administration. The Columbia Basin Team was established in 2003 as part of the 100th Meridian Initiative to address the special needs of the Columbia River Basin. The team includes representatives from a number of federal, state, tribal, academic, and non-governmental organizations.

More information on the team and the response plan is available at <http://www.100thmeridian.org/ColumbiaRT.asp>.

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