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January 26, 2012

MEMORANDUM

TO: Fish and Wildlife Committee members

FROM: Mark Walker – Director, Public Affairs Division
Jim Ruff – Manager, Mainstem Passage and River Operations

SUBJECT: Follow-up Actions to Prevent the Spread of Invasive Mussels in the Columbia River Basin

Council staff has been meeting and working closely with state and regional aquatic invasive species coordinators on possible management actions to help prevent the spread of quagga and/or zebra mussels into water bodies of the Columbia River Basin. At the January 10, 2012 meeting, staff briefed the Fish and Wildlife Committee members on 2011 mussel prevention activities in the four Pacific Northwest states and presented some potential management actions for 2012. At the February 7, 2012 meeting, staff will provide another update to Fish and Wildlife Committee members on recent regional coordination efforts and propose an action strategy for future management actions.

Background

At the January committee meeting, it was brought to your attention the current system to decontaminate watercraft leaving the federally-managed Lake Mead National Recreation Area (LMNRA) has been severely lacking in effectiveness. This has occurred despite numerous and repeated requests from western states (Idaho, Washington, Utah and Wyoming) and organizations (Northwest Power and Conservation Council, Pacific NW Economic Region and the Colorado River Fish and Wildlife Council) to the Secretary of Interior and/or the Superintendent of the LMNRA. Each of these letters has urged the Department of the Interior, and the LMNRA in particular, to implement a higher level of control and notification of departing boats, particularly for those boats that have been moored under contract with National Park Service concessionaires.

Staff also informed Council members of a good opportunity this year to reduce the threat of contaminated boats leaving LMNRA which has been provided through the FY 2012 Department of Interior budget. Language in the appropriations bill mandates that \$1 million in funding will go to “the implementation of mandatory operational inspection and decontamination stations at

Federally-managed or inter-jurisdictional water bodies considered to be of highest risk, as called for in the February 2010 Quagga-Zebra Mussel Action Plan for Western U.S. Waters.” The western states, as well as Northwest tribes and Lake Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, agree it is critical this funding should be used for on-the-ground actions beginning early in 2012 to inspect and decontaminate infested watercraft leaving infested water bodies from the lower Colorado River, such as LMNRA. This would help to greatly reduce the number of contaminated watercraft entering uninfested jurisdictions throughout the West, and in particular the Pacific Northwest.

List of Council Actions to Assist

Staff is recommending the Council consider and support the following actions to help prevent the spread of invasive mussels into Columbia River Basin waters.

1. As soon as possible, prepare and send letters to the directors of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the National Park Service (NPS) urging them to allocate the \$1 million in funding for increased mussel containment efforts at LMNRA. The State of Idaho has recently sent a letter on this issue to Secretary Salazar of Department of Interior (attached). Other western states, Pacific Northwest Economic Region, the tribes and Lake Tahoe are currently drafting and sending similar letters to these federal agencies.
2. Follow-up the letter with a Council and staff trip to Washington D.C. to meet with Department of Interior agencies to ensure these funds are allocated and used in the manner specified in our letters. For your information, the National Invasive Species week will occur this year during the week of February 26 through March 3. That week would be an ideal time for the Council to provide our message to the federal agencies and the appropriate Congressional offices.
3. If we are successful in getting this \$1 million in funding designated to LMNRA for mussel containment purposes, several Council members and staff could join a delegation from the four Northwest states and Lake Tahoe to meet directly with the National Park Service Superintendent of the LMNRA in early spring (March or early April) of 2012 to encourage and ensure the use of these funds to implement the most effective mussel prevention and notification program for all moored boats leaving the LMNRA.

Attachment

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D R A F T

Daniel M. Ashe, Director
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Room 3359
Washington, DC 20240

Re: Containing invasive mussels at Lake Mead National Recreation Area

Dear Director Ashe:

The Northwest Power and Conservation Council, an interstate compact comprising Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington, is directed by the Northwest Power Act of 1980 (PL 96-501) to prepare a power plan to assure the region's power supply and a program to protect and enhance fish and wildlife affected by hydropower dams. The Council's fish and wildlife program includes specific measures to address the effects of invasive, non-native species such as quagga and zebra mussels on native fish, wildlife, and habitat in the Columbia River Basin.

<http://www.nwcouncil.org/library/2009/2009-09/Default.asp>

Quagga and zebra mussels pose a serious and ongoing threat to our waters. Since quagga mussels were found in Lake Mead five years ago, they have spread to other water bodies in Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, and Utah. The four Northwest states and Wyoming are the only states in the western U.S. that currently have not tested positive for either quagga or zebra mussels. Nevertheless, these invasive species pose a direct threat to the Northwest's hydropower and water system infrastructure, and we are appealing for your assistance and cooperation to help prevent their further spread from Lake Mead.

Watercraft are the primary means for their movement from one body of water to another, and each Northwest state has established inspection and decontamination stations. Fortunately, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's FY 2012 appropriation also includes a \$1 million earmark for *"the implementation of mandatory operational inspection and decontamination stations at federally managed or interjurisdictional water bodies considered to be of highest risk."* Boats that have recently been in mussel-infested waters, such as Lake Mead, are considered "High Risk." Since 2009, the four Northwest states have intercepted and decontaminated a large

number of mussel-infested boats that originated from the lower Colorado region. The majority of these boats came from Lake Mead.

We strongly urge you, in concert with the National Park Service, to use the \$1 million earmark in your FY 2012 budget to establish a mandatory inspection and decontamination requirement for all vessels leaving the mussel-infested federal waters of Lake Mead. While our states have established watercraft inspection and decontamination stations, the chance of contaminated boats entering our waters would be much lower if an effective mussel containment program could be implemented at Lake Mead National Recreation Area. Furthermore, it is critical that such a program be implemented without delay, as seasonal boats will begin returning to Pacific Northwest waters in early spring.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. There is no question that a favorable decision to direct the Service's funds to Lake Mead will help protect the Pacific Northwest's waters and the species that inhabit them.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if we can be of any assistance.

Sincerely,

Joan Dukes, Chair

Copies/letters to:

Mr. Bryan Arroyo, Assistant Director
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