

Montana Rapid Response Exercise After Action Report

Flathead Lake Incident | September 11-13, 2018



This project was made possible by



Introduction

The Montana rapid response exercise gathered multiple partners together to explore and test the current State of Montana's *Dreissenid Mussel Rapid Response Guidelines*¹ on Flathead Lake September 11-13, 2018. In the event that Montana discovers invasive dreissenid mussels, effort to prepare for such a discovery assist in defining roles and responsibilities and, also raise new thoughts and solutions that could be used. This exercise utilized the *Dreissenid Mussel Rapid Response Guidelines* and the Incident Command System of the National Incident Management System. The ICS is a national system that provides a reliable and logical structure to strategizing and documenting response situations. The ICS command structure can be applied to emergency response situations, including those involving invasive species discovery.

The exercise followed a fictitious yet plausible scenario (Appendix A) where adult mussels were found on a boat recently purchased from the Midwest and found moored at Flathead Lake at Somers Bay. Somers Bay is located in the northwestern portion of Flathead Lake. This scenario represents a co-jurisdictional response with unified command comprised of Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) and the state of Montana.

This exercise was also part of the efforts by the 100th Meridian Initiative Columbia River Basin (CRB) Team. The CRB Team partners have been conducting rapid response exercises for over a decade with the goal of preparing the region and testing the Columbia River Basin Rapid Response Plan. The Montana exercise was the 9th exercise conducted and examined key aspects not yet explored.

Methodology

In February of 2018, key partners gathered to assemble an executive planning team to develop the exercise goals, participant list, and design the scenario. The team included the following individuals:

- Stephen Phillips, Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission
- Tom Woolf, Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks
- Erik Hanson, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes
- Kate Wilson, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation/ Upper Columbia Conservation Commission
- Joanne Grady, US Fish and Wildlife Service
- Leah Elwell, Invasive Species Action Network
- Ken Bridinger, Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks
- Jim Williams, Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks
- Buck Lapatie, RedSky All Hazard Training LCC

An optional ICS training, prior to the start of the exercise, was provided by Buck Lapatie who also served as the key ICS facilitator of the exercise. A list of exercise participants is provided (Appendix B)

¹ http://fwp.mt.gov/news/publicNotices/fishing/pn_0090.html

Goals and Objectives

The purpose of the rapid response exercise was to improve the Montana *Dreissenid Mussel Rapid Response Guidelines*, improve communication guidance, and continue to enhance Incident Command System familiarity. The exercise objectives focused on helping address response issues and assist in a better understanding of how a possible eradication of mussels in Montana might be conducted. The following objectives were examined:

- A. Command and Control: Through the Incident Command System, the exercise team will demonstrate the ability to engage, prioritize, coordinate and complete emergency response activities.
- B. Communication: Through the Incident Command System, the exercise team will demonstrate an ability to conduct and disseminate information of the detection, response and conclusion of a Dreissenid Emergency.
- C. Resource Management: Through the Incident Command System, the exercise team will demonstrate ability to respond to a Dreissenid Emergency and explore the utilization of an emergency resource system in conjunction with a geographic response plan, a map-based augmentation of the state's response guidelines.

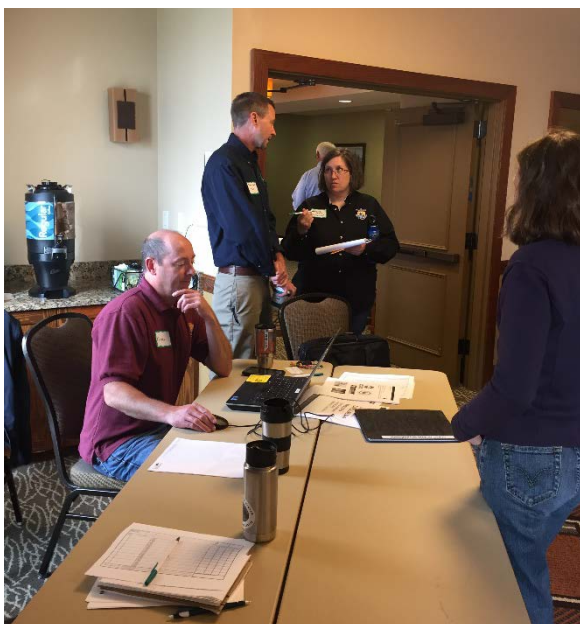


Figure 1. Above and left; Participants engaged in discussion and problem solving.

Exercise Variables and Key Outcomes

The executive planning team designed the exercise to take a deeper exploration into a possible eradication response as well as incorporating on-site activities. Prior to the exercise, the planning team made specific decisions for response and was able to develop the Phase I Incident Action Plan (Appendix C), allowing the exercise to begin “mid-stream”. This was the first time since the CRB Team rapid response exercises have been conducted that a dreissenid exercise began with an initial IAP in hand. This allowed the participants to determine if and how chemical eradication could take place under the scenario. And also created an exercise that was highly interactive and brought the participatory team to the completion of a Phase II - Incident Action Plan (Appendix D).

Part of every exercise is to challenge participants with problem-solving related to their exercise role, called “injects”. These injects test and add an additional dynamic. During the exercise, participants had to respond to additional injects that were provided by the facilitators.

Several unique outcomes were part of the exercise. The exercise was able to incorporate a detailed conference call consultation with an eradication chemical product representative and an experienced researcher on previous eradication projects to help inform final tactics for eradication within the exercise.

The exercise public information officers organized an actual press event for regional news outlets at the site of the scenario, North Flathead Lake Yacht Club. Multiple TV news and newspaper outlets attended the planned 2-hour event. The press event highlighted the efforts of Montana partners to test and exercise the Montana Framework and was initiated in real-time. Several TV news spots and articles resulted from this press event.

Over the past decade, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Region 6 Dive Team has been strengthening their capacity to respond on actual events, participate in exercises and provide surveillance efforts. The USFWS Region 6 Dive Team conducted 2 dives at the scenario and was



Figure 2. Exercise unified commanders Tom Woolf and Erik Hanson accompanied by exercise public information officers Germaine White and Dillon Tabish during the press event.

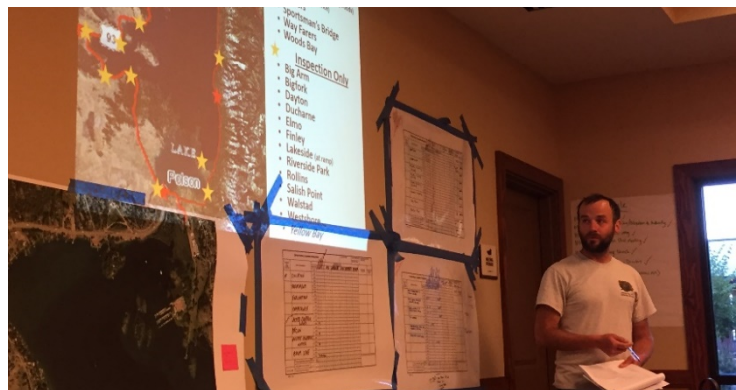


Figure 3. Exercise Planning Chief Ken Bridinger leads a tactics meeting.

able to collaborate with Flathead County Search and Rescue staff and volunteers. This collaboration connects local dive efforts with regional expertise and expands our capability in both exercise and response.

Two separate leadership briefings took place during the exercise; Montana agency and CSKT tribal leadership and the Columbia River Basin Multi-Agency Coordination Team. Both briefings allowed leadership and partners to better understand the communication lines during an exercise and probe the participants on the selected tactics.



Figure 4. Dive activities on site at North Flathead Lake Yacht Club. Above: Preparation for a dive. Below and right (Photos courtesy of Deb Goeb, US Fish and Wildlife Service): Divers examining structures for mussels.

Feedback

All participants completed an evaluation of the event (Appendix E) and also participated in an evaluation of the specific ICS section/position they acted within. A summary of the major themes found in the responses is provided here.

Positive Notes

- Great introduction to the incident command system
- The activity brought all parties closer together in a meaningful way
- Great discussions and resolutions
- Very informative and worthwhile
- To begin in the second operational period worked well
- Good communication between the chiefs and divisions; and within divisions
- Documentation Unit Lead and GIS Specialist were a good combination of roles
- Supervisor expertise was apparent
- Utilizing a local scenario that was of interest to all participants increased the exercise productivity
- Trainers were patient and well informed
- Combining the two dive teams allowed for collaboration and inter-agency communication
- Holding a real media event was a positive addition
- The exercise illustrated how GIS data resources could be utilized in a more easily consumed and coordinated manner
- Emphasize the value of the access to GIS and the AIS GeoDatabase to facilitate planning
- Direct communication with treatment experts (Hammond / McCartney) provided valuable insight
- USFWS would permit bull trout take as a result of treatment under existing FWP MOU
- Identified FWP could be a resource for applying an eradication treatment
- Clarification determined that US Army Corps of Engineers (COE) has funding in Headquarter Office for rapid response for instances similar to this. COE funding would be a 50:50 cost share when the state has jurisdiction

Things to Improve Upon

- A better background or rationale on why we use ICS for AIS could have been provided
- A better process could be used to address and resolve the injects receive during the exercise
- Too much paper; can the process find a way to use digital forms or project more
- There were inconsistencies in filling out forms among the divisions
- It was unclear when and how a critical review would be done on tactics selected
- Recommend that Finance Chief position be filled with actual finance professional
- More discussion on public access determinations during the exercise rather than assumptions would have been helpful
- Provide US Coast Guard ICS booklets to all participants
- Examples of some work products for each position would enhance the training materials

- Most of the ICS products work for an AIS incident, but some ICS forms/pieces could be pared down and determined what works best/if necessary
- NIMS ICS do not have finance forms
- More engagement with leadership (tribal, state agencies) to improve comfort in decision making
- An MOU is needed between FWP and CSKT to clarify AIS communication / data sharing.
- It would be useful to have a completed state-wide EA for a possible EarthTecQZ eradication treatment.
- A person with more knowledge / experience related to aquatic pesticides and treatment would have been useful in the IC.

Summary

Overall, the Montana Flathead Incident met the exercise objectives and participants gained a better understanding of utilizing ISC within an incident. The exercise provided various partners and agencies across the state with better understand of how a response could function should they be faced with one. Also, these types of exercises provide a foundation for preparedness and reveal to participating entities different strategies that could be implemented to prepare, including but not limited to additional training, cooperative agreements, or preparatory permitting paperwork. Finally, these exercises provide valuable insight into improving training and exercise aspects with new entities for future events conducted by the Columbia River Basin Team.

Appendices

Appendix A – Player’s Handbook

Appendix B – Participant List

Appendix C – Incident Action Plan Phase I

Appendix D – Incident Action Plan Phase II

Appendix E – Sample Situation Report

Appendix F - Participant Evaluations

Appendix B

Flathead Lake Rapid Response Exercise

Participant List (*participant joined remotely)

Affiliation	Participant
Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes	Erik Hanson
Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes	Barry Hansen
Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes	Germaine White
Montana Invasive Species Council	Bryce Christiaens
Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation/Upper Columbia Conservation Commission	Kate Wilson
Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks	Tom Woolf
Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks	Ken Breidinger
Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks	Dillon Tabish
Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks	Jon Obst
Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks	Zach Crete
Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks	Jayden Duckworth
Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks	Russ Hartzell
Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks	Jessi Gudgel
Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks	Mike Hensler
Montana Natural Heritage Program	Bryce Maxwell
Flathead Lake Biological Station	Phil Matson
Glacier National Park	Chris Downs
Flathead Lakers	Robin Steinkraus
US Fish and Wildlife Service	Joanne Grady
US Fish and Wildlife Service	Kevin Aceituno
US Fish and Wildlife Service	Deborah Goeb
US Fish and Wildlife Service	Karen Nelson
US Fish and Wildlife Service	Brian Ham
US Fish and Wildlife Service	Carlos Martinez
Flathead County Search and Rescue	Rich Schuster
Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission	Stephen Phillips
RedSky All-Hazard Training	Buck Lapatie
Invasive Species Action Network	Leah Elwell
Affiliation	MAC Participant
Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission	Stephen Phillips
Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks	Tom Woolf
Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes	Erik Hanson
Idaho Department of Agriculture*	Nic Zurfluh
Oregon Department of Fish and Game*	Rick Boatner
Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife*	Bill Tweit
Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife*	Captain Eric Anderson
BC Ministry of Environment*	Martina Beck
US Fish and Wildlife Service, Region 6	Joanne Grady
US Fish and Wildlife Service, Region 6*	Pamela Sponholtz
US Fish and Wildlife Service, Region 1*	Johnna Roy



Figure 5. Divers preparing to enter the water at the marina. Photo courtesy of Kate Wilson



Figure 6. Dillon Tabish of FWP addressing press participants at the marina. Photo courtesy of Kate Wilson