



## **Aquatic Invasive Species Summit**

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks hosted the Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) Summit on December 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>, 2019 at Carroll College in Helena, Montana. The purpose of the Summit was to bring together partners and interested parties from around the state to discuss AIS program progress and next steps to continue to enhance Montana's AIS Program. Issues and strategies identified at the Summit will inform the upcoming update of the Montana AIS Strategic Plan. The Summit was attended by more than 120 people from 50 different agencies and organizations.

## **Changes Since 2016**

Montana's AIS program has undergone significant changes following the detection of invasive mussels in Tiber Reservoir and the suspect detection in Canyon Ferry Reservoir in late 2016. As a result of the detections, the Governor declared a natural resource emergency, new regulations were put into place and new funding mechanisms were created to support an expanded effort to address the AIS threat. The AIS program tripled in size with increased staffing, more watercraft inspection stations, increased early detection monitoring and expanded education and outreach. The result is one of the most robust and effective AIS programs in the nation.

The Summit provided an opportunity for partners from around the state to come together with the uniting purpose of protecting the state from AIS. Participants also had the opportunity to meet and network with others around the state that are working on the same AIS issues. Through interaction and discussion, participants identified gaps and needs and outlined strategies and solutions.

Partner involvement in Montana's AIS program plays an important role in the program's success including management and operation of inspection stations, AIS early detection monitoring and delivering AIS outreach and education information. FWP coordinates closely with tribes, counties, conservation districts, cities, state agencies, federal agencies and non-governmental organizations to promote a consistent and effective AIS program state-wide.

The Summit took place over two days. The first day of the summit focused on existing efforts and program progress at a broad level and the second day focused on specific topics with breakout sessions. The meeting was facilitated by Ginny Tribe who kept the meeting on track and on schedule. Time was allotted for questions after each presentation and question/comment cards were available throughout the Summit to solicit questions and input. Feedback from the sessions clearly illustrated how much the AIS program has evolved and how it continues to adapt to better address the threats of AIS.

## DAY 1

### AIS Program Overview

The first day of the summit focused on existing efforts and program progress at a broad level. Information was provided on the history and current status of each of these topics.

- Regional AIS efforts: Stephen Phillips, Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission
- Watercraft inspections: Zach Crete, FWP
- Early detection monitoring: Craig McLane, FWP
- Outreach and education: Liz Lodman, FWP

### Budget Panel

A budget panel provided an overview on AIS funding and discussed funding sources and expenditures for DNRC, Whitefish Lake Institute and FWP AIS programs. The panel emphasized the need to be strategic and prioritize needs to maximize the impact of limited resources.

*Panelists: Mark Bostrom (DNRC), Lori Curtis (Whitefish Lake Institute), Lena Havron (FWP)*

### Legislative Panel

Senator Mike Cuffe, Representative Willis Curdy, Senator Janet Ellis and Representative Neil Duram discussed how AIS was addressed during the legislative session, constituent engagement and what to expect related to AIS in the next legislative session.

The panelist emphasized the importance of communication and engagement with legislators on issues that people feel are important.

Senator Cuffe also took the opportunity to present a draft bill that would allow for a \$10,000 fine for boats transporting zebra or quagga mussels into the state.



*Senator Mike Cuffe*

*Helena IR-Thom Bridge*

## Day 1 Observations

At the close of the first day the facilitator summarized key points and participant input. Observations included:

- *People are engaged and we need to continue to stay engaged.*
- *People are taking the problem seriously.*
- *Work needs to be done with Legislators in the interim – between session.*
- *This is a national issue.*
- *We are seeing lots of progress.*
- *We are seeing some changed behavior.*
- *Although we are stretched, we have some capacity to deal it.*
- *Consider a \$10,000 fine.*
- *Partnerships rock!*



*2019 AIS Summit at Carroll College - Helena*

## DAY 2

FWP Director Martha Williams provided a welcome to the group and highlighted the progress of the AIS program since mussels were detected in 2016. She emphasized the importance of partnerships and coordination to the success of the AIS program and asked all in attendance to provide input and engage in the effort to build the most effective AIS program possible.

Day two of the Summit involved three focused panels with corresponding breakout sessions.

### **Invasive Species Law Review**

The Montana Invasive Species Council (MISC) conducted an Invasive Species Law Review to evaluate invasive species gaps and needs in Montana law and rule. The panel presented AIS related issues identified in the law review and discussed the process to address these issues in law or rule.

**Panelists:** *Bryce Christiaens (MISC), Hope Stockwell (Legislative Services), Aimee Hawkaluk (FWP)*

Following the panel, a breakout session asked participants to evaluate and prioritize gaps in AIS law and rule, and to identify other programmatic needs. The priority recommendations generated from the breakout session include:

- *The need for one AIS list that includes both plants and animals with clearly defined management authority.*
- *The need to clearly define agency roles, responsibilities and authorities for implementing the AIS program in the state.*
- *The need to evaluate the Invasive the Species Trust fund to identify strategies to make it more functional.*
- *Concerns about the penalties being too low for failure to stop at inspection stations.*
- *The need for a pull-the-plug requirement for boats to help ensure they are clean, drained and dry and to aid in enforcement.*
- *Concerns related to the out of state boat fee including the lack of a visible decal to aid in enforcement and compliance and the exemption of canoes from the fee.*
- *Consider taxes on short term lodging rentals as a funding source for AIS.*

Other non-legislative or rule recommendations from the session included:

- *The need for expanded enforcement at inspection stations.*
- *The need for more AIS related signage and trained hosts at state parks.*
- *The need for simplified and consistent watercraft inspection protocols.*
- *The need to expand outreach and communication on the AIS issue.*

## Watercraft Inspections

The second panel focused on challenges related to operating watercraft inspection stations. Panelists represented watercraft inspection managers and supervisors from around the state who deal with the day to day challenges of staffing and running stations. The panel answered pre-prepared questions and questions from the audience.

**Panelists:** *Dusty Olson (Garfield Conservation District), Mike Koopal (Whitefish Lake Institute), DeNeill Trombley (Blackfeet Nation), Erik Hanson (CSKT), Russ Hartzell (FWP)*



*Watercraft Inspections Panel*

Following the panel, a breakout session asked participants to identify creative solutions that would help improve how watercraft inspections operate statewide. Participants identified the following solutions:

- *Improve quality control at stations through:*
  - More selective hiring of inspectors.
  - Pay inspectors more.
  - Offer incentives.
  - Improve training with more hands-on and on-site training.
  - Expand oversight and supervision.
  - Provide follow up refresher training.
  - Improve employee work environment.
  - Inspire inspectors to be invested in the job.
  - Install cameras at stations.
  - Develop a QA plan.
- *Expand partner involvement for managing inspection stations.*
- *Expand enforcement presence at stations.*
- *Increase outreach and communication on AIS issues.*
- *Explore building permanent stations at high risk locations.*
- *Explore 24-hour operation at high risk locations.*
- *Identify additional funding to support expanded prevention efforts.*
- *Share and communicate successes.*
- *Broaden the scope of inspection stations to function as Recreation Access Sites.*
- *Package positions to make the job more appealing (AIS / block management / CWD).*
- *Offer college credit for working at stations.*
- *Include training modules on the data tablet.*

## **AIS Early Detection Monitoring**

The third panel discussed AIS early detection monitoring. Discussion focused on strategies to expand and improve AIS monitoring and early detection as well as the movement of AIS through fish stocking in private ponds.

**Panelists:** *Stacy Schmidt (FWP), Patricia Gilbert (US Army Corps of Engineers), Phil Matson (Flathead Biological Station), Cynthia Ingelfinger (Whitefish Lake Institute), Travis Horton (FWP)*

Following the panel, a breakout session asked participants for ideas to expand AIS early detection monitoring and other input on improving the program's ability to detect AIS.

Participants made these recommendations:

- *Expand partner involvement with monitoring through citizen science, schools, NGO's and local groups.*
  - Provide more trainings and opportunities to increase involvement in early detection monitoring.
  - Provide supplies to encourage involvement.
  - Publicize more broadly how the public reports suspected AIS.
- *Publicize the monitoring program more.*

- *Evaluate and address lab capacity to ensure samples are collected and analyzed in a timely manner.*
- *Identify additional funding to support expanded monitoring.*
- *Engage and involve DEQ with AIS survey.*
- *Develop a QA plan for the AIS lab.*
- *Continue to investigate eDNA to develop as an operational tool for AIS early detection.*



*Early Detection Monitoring Panel*

## Day 2 Observations

At the end of the second day, key points and input were summarized with the group. This feedback included:

- *We're thankful for the AIS Program.*
- *The Summit gave us opportunities to connect with people.*
- *We strive for excellence in our work and in our results.*
- *The discussion about aquatic invasive species has evolved and has become value-added.*
- *We are learning to celebrate our successes.*
- *We are excited about the upcoming Strategic Plan.*
- *We are feeling optimistic.*

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## Post Summit Evaluation

Following the Summit an evaluation survey was sent to participants. Feedback from Summit attendees was overwhelmingly positive and supported the Summit format. Participants supported the idea of having future Summit meetings to share information and coordinate AIS efforts. Responses from the survey identified several areas for improvement for future meetings including:

- *Focus more on specific issues and discussion during breakout sessions.*
- *More time for discussion and constructive criticism.*
- *Focus on actions and goals for the upcoming season.*
- *More focus on how we are going to get things done rather than what we currently do.*

Feedback and input from the Summit will contribute to the development of the AIS Strategic Plan and will:

- Help guide how Montana’s AIS program approaches AIS prevention, early detection and outreach.
- Outline goals and objectives.
- Provide guidance to continually evaluate and improve how Montana addresses the AIS issue.



*Central Eastern MT Invasive Species Team Members at the AIS Summit*

### **Thank You**

To all the great people from around the state that traveled to Helena in December to work together on the AIS issue, thank you for attending the Summit. Your interest, dedication, engagement and involvement are critical to the success of the AIS program in Montana.

