

Trans-boundary Collaborative Efforts to keep the Crown of the Continent Ecosystem free of Aquatic Invasive Species

The 2011 Crown Managers Forum on aquatic invasive species (AIS) was the spark that initiated the Crown Managers Partnership (CMP) into action to prevent AIS from infecting the Crown of the Continent Ecosystem (CCE). After the forum the AIS committee started working on an AIS strategy for the CMP.

The committee took home messages from the 2011 forum and built presentations to start spreading awareness on the threat of AIS within the CMP agencies. In the spring of 2012 the CMP steering committee held a meeting with the Trans-Boundary Directors Group (TBDG), comprised of directors from various Alberta provincial agencies and Parks Canada. The participants were given a presentation on AIS and their immediate threat to the CCE and Alberta.

An AIS risk assessment workshop was held in Waterton in the fall of 2012. Attendees included representatives from federal, provincial and municipal governments as well as non-government agencies, watershed councils and other stakeholders that would be impacted by AIS in Alberta, together with representatives from Montana and Idaho. Based on the risk assessment, a five pronged strategy was developed entailing: communications, education and outreach; inspections; monitoring; legislation, policy and planning; and establishing a 1-800 number.

The Trans-Boundary Directors Group has continued to strongly support the AIS strategy and secure resourcing support from the involved government agencies. The strategy is to demonstrate a 'win' first in the Alberta portion of the CCE; use this as a base for development of a Crown-wide trans-boundary AIS strategy as well as development of a provincial AIS program in Alberta.

Building on recommendations and collaborative efforts with Montana and Idaho, Alberta is moving forward with watercraft inspections in the spring of 2013. Six summer students have been hired by the Blood Tribe First Nation, Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development, Alberta Tourism Parks and Recreation and Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development (AARD). They are currently in training and their efforts will be focused on AIS education and manning inspection stations near Coutts, Carway and in the Crowsnest Pass. The summer students will be working along side Alberta Parks Conservation Officers who will also be devoting some of the summer workload to conducting inspections in southern Alberta. Monitoring programs are commencing this summer in cooperation with the Alberta Lakes Management Society. Select waterbodies will be monitored for the presence of zebra and quagga mussels and Eurasian water milfoil. There will be both sampling of the water column and substrate sampling. Alberta ESRD will be sampling 40 lakes province-wide and AARD in cooperation with the irrigation districts will be sampling an additional 18 waterbodies.

The Government of Alberta has assigned a temporary provincial AIS coordinator who is working with counterparts in Manitoba, British Columbia, Montana and Idaho on their AIS efforts and best management practices ensuring unified efforts and messaging across the border to help prevent AIS from infecting the Crown of the Continent. The province of Alberta will also be hiring an AIS Specialist.

Collaboration is also occurring in the form of the CMP for supporting the Flathead Biological Station by contributing funds to a DNA analysis protocol that will aid in the early detection of adult and juvenile mussels. The DNA analysis protocol will provide more efficient detection of mussels with less error and at lower cost.

The Montana AIS program is in full swing and continues to provide support for the Alberta programming by sharing best practices and recommendations. As of April 2013, Montana passed House Bill No. 586 in legislature that is “An act revising laws related to aquatic invasive species; establishing a statewide invasive species management area; authorizing use of quarantine measures and check stations at key entry points to the state; defining and authorizing inspection of equipment; revising departmental duties, including duties of the Department of Transportation, Granting Rulemaking Authority; providing an appropriation amending certain sections and providing effective dates.” Montana continues to work with Alberta and British Columbia in developing an AIS trans-boundary management protocol for the CCE.

In 2012, both British Columbia and Saskatchewan adapted their existing legislation to address aquatic invasive species. In both provinces, these amendments were made in less than 6 months.

For more details on invasive species threatening the CCE, see our AIS handbook, “Aquatic Invasive Species threatening the Crown of the Continent”. It is available online at www.crownmanagers.org/publications/. A limited number of printed copies are available at not cost, contact Mary Riddle at mary_riddle@nps.gov.

The Crown Managers Partnership is working towards a Crown of the Continent wide transboundary AIS protocol that will unify AIS prevention and management efforts across the entire Crown of the Continent. Meetings between all jurisdictions are underway, the target is to draft a protocol by the fall of 2013.