

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **WRDA passes, federal funding for mussel defense slow to reach states**

The U.S. Senate approved the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) on Thursday, authorizing \$9 billion in spending on 25 water development projects across the nation. The bill authorizes up to \$20 million to be administered by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to match state spending for watercraft inspection stations protecting the Columbia River Basin, including those in Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Montana, from aquatic invasive species.

States in the Pacific Northwest need federal funding authorized by WRDA to support the operation of watercraft inspection stations, where boats carrying invasive quagga and zebra mussels can be stopped and cleaned before they reach Northwest waterways. However, states urgently need the \$4 million appropriated last year for the same purpose to clear the corps' administrative process.

In December of 2015, Congress appropriated \$4 million within the federal budget to match state spending in Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Montana on watercraft inspection stations. Unfortunately, these states have not yet received any federal money for contracts from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the administrating agency.

"It is imperative that the corps act quickly. The threat of a mussel infestation is real and the damage will severely impact the environment and the economy of the entire Columbia River basin," said state Sen. Jim Honeyford, Washington.

An invasion of quagga or zebra mussels would rapidly foul and damage the operations of hydropower, irrigation, fish hatcheries and municipal water facilities vital to our region's economy. These filter-feeders also disrupt pre-existing food webs and impact fish habitat.

A Pacific NorthWest Economic Region (PNWER) economic impact assessment estimated the cost of an invasion in Western Canada and the Pacific Northwest U.S. would be \$500 million annually. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimates that if zebra and quagga mussels invade the Columbia River, they could cost hydroelectric facilities alone up to \$300 million a year and incur additional costs associated with environmental damage and increased operating expenses to fish hatcheries and water diversions.

"We commend the leadership of the Northwest Senate delegation in supporting this bipartisan bill. After years working with state and federal legislators, state agencies and non-profit partners, the states need federal support now to prevent devastating environmental and economic damage that could reach \$500 million annually in the Pacific Northwest," said PNWER Executive Director Matt Morrison.

The Pacific Northwest is the last remaining region in the country that does not have established populations of quagga and zebra mussels. The mussels multiply quickly and are easily transported across jurisdictions through waterways and on boat hulls and in ballast tanks. Once the mussels establish themselves in a waterway, there is no proven method of eradicating them.

Amendments to the 2016 Senate version of WRDA effectively double the federal funding available to states by allowing funds to go to stations that protect the Columbia River Basin, but are located outside of it. To allow federal funds to flow to stations outside the Columbia River Basin, PNWER and its partners worked with federal delegations, including U.S. Sen. Patty Murray's office, to change "in the basin" to "protect the basin" in the Senate version of the 2016 WRDA bill.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' interpretation of the 2014 WRDA allowed federal funds to support only stations located within the Columbia River Basin. Approximately half of the inspection stations in the four Pacific Northwest states are established every year in strategic locations outside of the Columbia River Basin; along interstate highways and on high traffic routes to and from areas with mussel-infested waterways.

The watercraft inspection station on Interstate 5 in Ashland, Oregon, for example, is the second busiest in the state with 5,051 clean inspections and 110 contaminated inspections in 2015, according to the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. Although it guards Oregon waters - including the Columbia River - from infected boats coming from California, it would not qualify for federal assistance under the Corps' interpretation of the 2014 bill because it is outside the Columbia River Basin.

## ABOUT PNWER

Coordinating a perimeter defense of the Pacific Northwest has been a major priority of PNWER and its partners. The Pacific NorthWest Economic Region's Invasive Species Working Group presented a Regional Framework for Perimeter Defense against Invasive zebra and quagga mussels in July of 2015. The framework identifies ways states, provinces and federal border agents can help prevent the spread of mussels and estimates funding needs and possible sources to implement control measures.

PNWER also co-sponsored the Mussel Prevention Leadership Forum, which took place December 8 in Vancouver, B.C., to produce the Invasive Mussel Prevention Framework for Western Canada.

The Pacific NorthWest Economic Region (PNWER) is a public/private non-profit created by statute in 1991. Member jurisdictions include Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, Montana and Washington, and the Canadian provinces and territories of British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, the Northwest Territories and Yukon. PNWER's mission is to increase the economic well-being and quality of life for all citizens of the region; identify and promote "models of success;" and serve as a conduit to exchange information.

Learn more about PNWER's Invasive Species Working Group at [www.pnwer.org/invasive-species](http://www.pnwer.org/invasive-species).

Read the full report: [Advancing a Regional Defense Against Dreissenids in the Pacific Northwest](#)

Bill information is available at: [www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/senate-bill/2848](http://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/senate-bill/2848).