

# Fourth of July holiday busiest for City Beach boat inspections

## 2,200 boats checked for AIS in 2015

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About 2,200 boats were inspected last summer as part of Whitefish's aquatic invasive species management program at City Beach.

The busiest days for boat traffic came during the Fourth of July holiday. Overall, the number of boats on the lake was up compared to the previous year.

These numbers are from a Whitefish Lake Institute report given to City Council last month. The city contracts with WLI to implement the AIS inspection program with the goal of preventing the introduction and spread of invasives to local lakes.

City Council on March 21 gave its OK to allocate \$30,000 to continue the AIS program for 2016. This year's plan looks as six different task areas.

The boat inspection station at City Beach will continue with WLI working alongside city staff. Visual inspections of the boats along with a survey of boat owners is conducted. In addition, this year WLI will expand its online permit program to include individual users rather than just commercial users. To obtain a permit, a user must complete online training and demonstrate their knowledge with a brief test. The permit is then displayed to the boat inspector at City Beach.

Monitoring and control efforts of Eurasian watermilfoil will continue at Beaver Lake. In 2011, the watermilfoil was found near the boat ramp at the lake.

The Northwest Montana Lake Volunteer Monitoring Network will coordinate efforts to survey lakes for invasive species plant detection.

The institute will also collect samples from nine area lakes for environmental DNA analysis, which looks at genetic information to detect the presence AIS.

New this year, WLI will perform research on boats with ballast tanks in relation to shoreline erosion and AIS infections and provide a report to the city.

According to 2015 data, an average of 35 boats were inspected per day between 9 a.m. and 7 p.m. The busiest times for watercraft inspections were between noon and 2 p.m.

"When the water heats up, it is busy," said Mike Koopal, executive director at WLI. "There's also fishermen and fisherwomen — mostly local people — who launch early before the inspection station opens."

The majority of the watercraft inspected had previously launched in Whitefish Lake. About 6 percent, or 136 of the boats, had previously launched in Flathead Lake, which is home to invasive species such as curly-leaf pondweed and flowering rush. There were also three boats that had previously launched in known mussel-infested waters in the Colorado River system.

Inspectors record the type of watercraft launched at City Beach. About 60 percent are boats, 9 percent are pon-

toon, 16 percent are personal water craft and 18 percent are hand launch, such as kayaks, paddleboards and canoes.

A quarter of the watercraft launched contained a ballast tank, a compartment that holds water. Mussel larvae, as well as fish pathogens and plant fragments.

That number is alarming, Koopal said, because the concern is that larvae in the tanks could get into the lake. Many AIS, including zebra and quagga mussels, have been introduced into the Great Lakes in the discharge of ballast water, he noted.

In addition, the use of ballast tanks for creating a larger wake has become increasingly popular, he said, which can increase shoreline erosion. Glacier National Park currently bans boats with ballast tanks from entering the park.