

City renews AIS prevention plan

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By HEIDI DESCH
Whitefish Pilot

Whitefish will once again continue its program aimed at preventing the entry of aquatic invasive species in Whitefish Lake.

The city requires that all boats entering the lake be inspected for AIS, and decontaminated as required.

Mike Koopal, executive director of Whitefish Lake Institute, said that while the number inspection stations in Montana have increased it's still necessary to inspect boats at City Beach and State Park on the lake.

"The state has ramped up stations at the border so the Whitefish stations have become more tertiary, but the more eyes we have on boats the better," he said.

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There were about 5,900 watercraft visits last year at city inspection stations on the lake, compared with about 6,400 in 2017.

Koopal said a decrease in the total number of boats was likely due to cold and rainy weather in May and June last year.

"The number of inspections at City Beach and State Park mirror each other so it's good to have the user crowd spread out," Koopal noted.

Last year there were 215 decontaminations were performed of high-risk watercraft, which

includes those with ballast tanks/bags or from mussel infested states or waterbodies and not out of the water for 30 days, those with standing water or those too dirty to inspect.

During a work session, City Council last week gave a preliminary OK to a request to fund the AIS program, but will have to formally approve the spending as part of its fiscal year 2020 budget adoption.

In fiscal year 2019, the city budget calls for spending about \$138,000 for AIS prevention. For fiscal year 2020, the city is budgeting to spend just over \$119,000.

The city is expected to

pay up to about \$15,000 to WLI for early detection monitoring, sampling, surveying and reporting related to the AIS prevention program.

The city provides staffing for inspections at both City Beach and State Park, which will continue this year. Inspections run from May through September.

A change this summer is planned to relocate the boat decontamination station to the City Beach overflow parking lot. For the past two summers the station had been located on U.S. Highway 93 south of town in two different locations.

"The goal by locating it at the City Beach

overflow parking is to simplify the process," Koopal said. "The public will be less confused than if we move it again, and it will provide a quick turnaround time for those boats that get to the lake and have to return to decontamination station before entering the lake."

WLI will retain ownership and maintenance of the station, but the city will provide staffing to the station. Under a memorandum of understanding, WLI would provide funding to the city to assist with costs for staffing and infrastructure improvements for the location.

City Manager Adam Hammatt noted that WLI

will contribute about \$10,000 for staffing costs for the decontamination station increasing the city's expenses as a result of the change by only \$5,900.

"We talked about how can we take on staffing and save some back to WLI," he said. "Also it makes sense for the city to handle staffing when

the decontamination station is on our property."

The city in 2013 began supporting an AIS program as recommended by the institute with the goal of preventing the transfer of AIS to local water bodies through various tools. In the years since the program has been adjusted as needed and named Our Lake Our Future.