

## OUT OF BOUNDS ROB BREEDING

# IT'S INSPECTION SEASON



**H**AVE A WATERCRAFT INSPECTION confession. A few years back I pulled my raft out of Wyoming's Shoshone River. The take out was a muddy mess, and at some point in the process of loading my boat on the trailer, I climbed into the raft, probably to tie something up. In the process, I picked up a load of silt with my Tevas, and deposited it on the floor of the raft.

I noticed the mess as I was tying things up. I intended to rinse it off that evening when I made it back to the house, as I usually do after a float. This time, however, I forgot.

When did I remember to wash it out? Not that night, sidetracked as I was by a stop at a favorite burger and beer joint. The next day I packed my gear up and headed for the Flathead. When I passed the road-side sign on the southern edge of Ravalli announcing an inspection station ahead, I remembered I'd left that mess in the boat.

For a brief instant the thought of pulling a quick U-turn on Highway 93 and racing back to a carwash in Arlee crept into my head, but I resisted this improper impulse. I've seen the results of folks running checkpoints while driving up the hill just north of the inspection station. Once, while approaching the hill crest west of St. Ignatius where drivers are awarded with one of the most epic views in all of Montana, I saw flashing lights in the mirror. Fortunately, the law enforcement vehicle steered around me.

A mile or so ahead I came upon those same lights and their intended target: an SUV with a couple of kayaks on the roof. The driver may have mistakenly thought little boats don't count.

So I conceded to the notion that I'd have to take my medicine whatever the check station personnel dished out. I apologized profusely for my boat washing

negligence. The inspector's frowned at the now dried mud on the floor of my raft, but fortunately, they explained, the station was equipped with a power washer. They'd clean my boat for me, and then I'd be on my way.

It was beginning to feel like a win-win.

The wash meant my dirty raft was more embarrassing than threatening. The guys at the check station did what I neglected to do by spraying it out. Actually, they did a better job, but that doesn't mean I get a pass on my negligence. Check stations are opening up across the Rocky Mountain region, looking for hitchhiking invasive species, but they're not all staffed 24/7. Boaters are still required to search out an inspection when they cross the divide into western Montana, even if they passed a station after hours. But how many boaters realize this, or will remember to do so?

You need to monitor your wading gear and keep it clean as well. Rinse your waders and boots, then set them out to dry thoroughly. And if you're particularly concerned about spreading aquatic invaders you can take the extra step of popping your boots in the freezer to kill frost-vulnerable organisms.

My wading boots are Korkers, which come with removable soles. It's a handy feature that makes cleaning or freezing even easier.

Inspections began in March, and hundreds of boats have already been checked. One boat, en route from the Great Lakes to the Seattle area on I-90, had dead zebra mussels on its transom. The boat was decontaminated before the hauler was allowed to finish the trip.

Still, the only way to be fully off the hook is to clean and inspect your boat every time you use it. Make it so routine that not even a cold beer a burger will distract you from your boat washing duties.