



Paiute Tribe starts voluntary boat inspections, removes Sacramento perch limit at Pyramid Lake



Written by

Jeff DeLong

jdelong@rgj.com

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Potential danger to Pyramid Lake from invading mollusks has the attention of the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe, which is taking steps to avoid a problem that could come with dire environmental and economic damage.

The Tribal Council recently approved regulatory changes which, among other things, will begin a boater education program and the voluntary inspection of some boats launching into the desert lake.

The effort is designed to avoid the possible infestation of quagga mussels, which tribal officials acknowledge would be a disaster.

“These mussels could absolutely destroy all the hard work that’s been done,” said Scott Carey, tribal planner.

That work, Carey said, includes not only long-standing efforts to protect the lake’s ecology but also restoration of the threatened Lahontan cutthroat trout and endangered cui-ui fish.

Fishing changes

Other changes at Pyramid Lake have been made to make the area more “user-friendly” to anglers.

One lifts a ban that had been in place at the “nets area” at Sutcliffe during Lahontan cutthroat spawning between March 15 and May 16. Tribal fisheries experts determined closure of the area is not necessary for successful spawning, Carey said.

The other removes a 10-fish limit for Sacramento perch, a popular fish. Allowing an unlimited perch catch could work toward removing the non-native fish, Carey said.

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“The tribe wants them out. They do more harm than they do good,” he said.

Mussels

Quagga mussels were first discovered in Lake Mead in 2007 and have since overrun the popular Southern Nevada reservoir. Officials are concerned they could become established at Lake Tahoe, where boats have been inspected for their presence since 2008. Nevada lawmakers are now considering law to establish a statewide boat inspection program, largely because of the threat posed by quagga mussels.

The Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe lacks needed resources to establish a mandatory boat inspection program and a fee base to support it, Carey said. But tribal officials see a need to begin moving in that direction, he said.

“Looking at Lake Mead, a similar situation could happen at Pyramid Lake,” Carey said. “The damage to the fishery and ecosystem of the lake is one thing. They could also totally destroy the beaches.

“This is as much an economic issue as an environmental one.”

The idea is to begin educating Pyramid boaters about the danger. Boaters could also be asked to fill out a questionnaire when obtaining a boating permit, asking among other things if they have had their vessels in contaminated bodies of water such as Lake Mead. If the answer is yes, rangers would conduct a voluntary inspection of the boat to look for attached

mussels.

Fishermen reactions

On a fishing trip at the lake this week, Central California residents Mark McDermott and Mark Vaughan described boat inspections and other steps to prevent spread of the quagga mussels as an unfortunate necessity.

“It’s one more thing,” said McDermott, 62. “I’d rather not be inconvenienced to have my boat inspected, but I guess it’s something we have to pay attention to. We have to try and not spread them.”

Vaughan said he suspects mussels might be spread from the stomachs of birds flying lake to lake, but he agreed boat inspections are probably needed.

“It’s coming to a theater near you whether you like it or not,” said Vaughan, 52. He visits Pyramid every year for a fishing trip.

“I kind of hate to see any changes come

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here,” he said. “It’s one of those things that’s maybe inevitable.”



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A fishing boat on Pyramid Lake in the Sutcliffe Marina area on Wednesday, April 6, 2011. / Photo by David B. Parker/RGJ

Changes at Pyramid Lake

- » New education program, voluntary boat inspections to prevent introduction of quagga mussels and other invasive species.
- » March 15 through May 15 ban on fishing near Sutcliffe’s “nets area” lifted.
- » Ten-fish limit for catching Sacramento perch lifted.

Source: Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe

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