blackfeet mation



2016-2020
aquatic invasive
species strategy

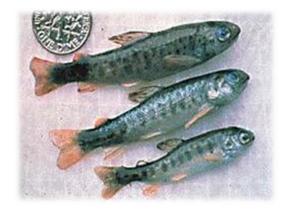
INTRODUCTION

Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS), like the zebra and quagga mussel, threaten Blackfeet Nation waters as well as the entire Crown of the Continent region. AIS do not follow political boundaries or state lines and have been transported all over the nation via fouled watercraft and gear. Once introduced, AIS can adverse impact fisheries, recreation, and property values. AIS can be extremely expensive to control and in some cases impossible to eradicate.

To address the threat of AIS, the Tribal Business Council enacted Ordinance 113, which prohibits the transport of AIS on the Reservation, and requires all boats to be inspected prior to launching on any Tribal waters. As enacted, Ordinance 113 provides for the most robust and effective AIS prevention program in the State of Montana, and perhaps even in the nation.

In order to fully implement Ordinance 113, this Strategic Plan outlines specific steps that will be taken for the next five years to prevent, monitor and manage AIS in the Blackfeet Nation. This framework outlines the actions that will be implemented to: (1) keep our waters a premier fishing destination in the region; and (2) react effectively in case of an unwanted AIS introduction.





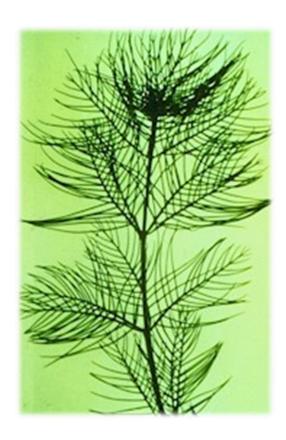


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BACKGROUND OF AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES

Introductions of Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) have caused the decline and extinction of many plant and animal species, and are cited as a cause of endangerment for 48% of the species listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). In 2005, invasive species cost the US economy over \$120 billion. Their occurrence and distribution are increasing rapidly. For all of these reasons, there is an immediate need to develop local, regional, and national strategies for prevention and management of AIS.

AIS are nonindigenous invasive species that can harm aquatic ecosystems and their capacity to benefit people. AIS influence nearly every aquatic ecosystem in the United States, posing risks to native species within those ecosystems, as well as human and wildlife health. AIS can be plants, such as Eurasian watermilfoil; animals, such as zebra mussels or nonnative fishes; pathogens; and other microorganisms, such as the parasite that causes whirling disease. Once introduced into new habitats these organisms disturb native species through competition, predation, displacement, hybridization, spread of disease and parasites, and can ultimately cause extinction of many valued organisms. AIS can also affect humans by causing adverse impacts to cultural, commercial, agricultural, aquacultural, and recreational activities that depend on water resources for their viability.

AlS are introduced to new habitats though both natural and human-caused mechanisms. In many waters, fisheries management programs have intentionally transplanted nonnative sport fish to provide recreational opportunities. Other aquatic organisms have been transported via ballast water in ships, aquarium releases, and illegal translocations. Regardless of the cause of species introductions, the establishment and proliferation of AlS often results in the decline of native organisms and the modification of aquatic communities. Over the past 50 years the rate of AlS introduction has dramatically increased. Once introduced, populations often grow quickly and spread rapidly due to lack of natural controls. Once established, AlS can displace native species, clog waterways, impact municipal and industrial irrigation and power systems, degrade ecosystems, reduce or threaten recreational and commercial fishing opportunities, and can cause wildlife and public health problems.

Aquatic Invasive Species are a serious problem in Montana. There are currently over 70 nonindigenous aquatic species reported in Montana and many more could be accidentally introduced. Current state activities and mandates have addressed AIS, their prevention, and control. However, there is a need to combat AIS at the local watershed levels to assist with these efforts.

This strategic plan is tiered to the federally approved State Aquatic Nuisance Species Management Plan, and is the initial step in establishing a cooperative program in the Blackfeet Indian Reservation to help address AIS threats. This AIS plan is a coordinated, grass-roots effort to combat AIS throughout the Blackfeet Nation through watercraft inspections stations, early detection and assessment of newly established invaders; monitoring of invading populations; implementing public outreach and education programs; improving understanding of the ecology of invaders and factors in the resistance of habitats to invasion; and supporting the development and testing of prevention, management, and control methods.

GOAL OF PLAN

Ordinance 113, "The Blackfeet Nation Aquatic Invasive Species Act," was enacted on April 9, 2015. Ordinance is the governing document t adopted by the Blackfeet Nation to ensure that Aquatic Invasive Species are not introduced to, or spread within, the Blackfeet Nation. This Plan outlines specific strategies and actions to be taken in the next five years to support Ordinance 113, thereby keeping AIS from gaining a foothold within the Blackfeet Nation and the region as a whole.

About the Blackfeet Aquatic Invasive Species Effort

In 2015, Blackfeet Nation initiated a pilot program designed to provide the most robust level of protection against AIS in the state. While individual water bodies, such as Lake Tahoe, have similarly robust programs, no single governmental entity -- tribal or non-tribal – has implemented a program providing such stringent protection on a broader landscape scale for multiple water bodies.

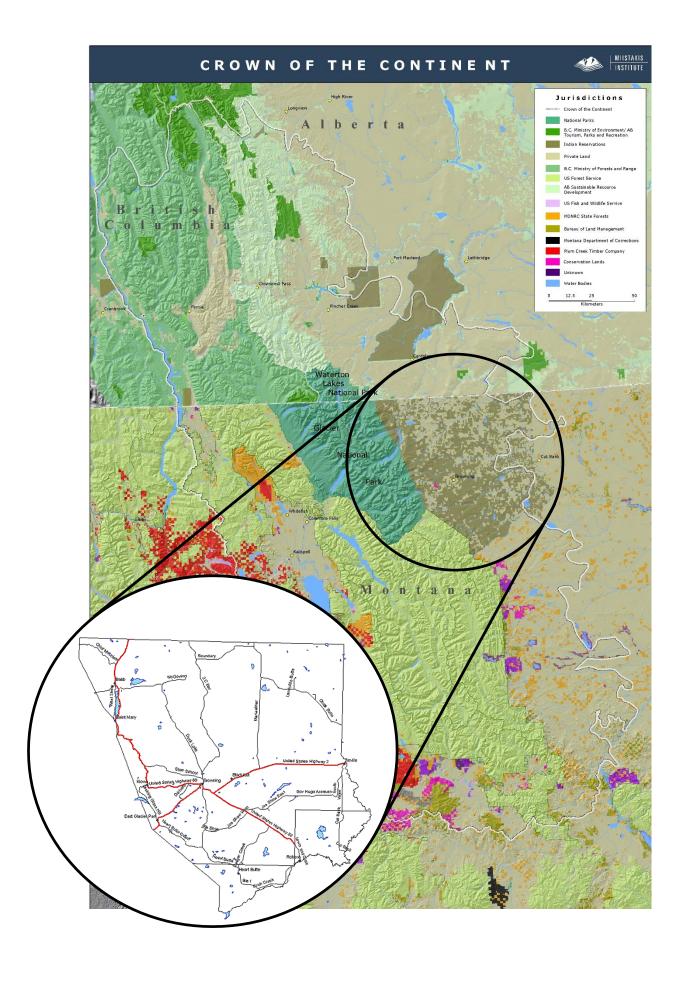
Originally, the main facet of the Tribe's AIS Program was the Highway 2 watercraft inspection station located between Browning and East Glacier. This watercraft inspection station was unique in the State of Montana due to:

- Certificates of Inspection: Any boat wishing to launch on Blackfeet waters was required to obtain a
 Certificate of Inspection prior to launching. No other state or tribal governments in the northwest require
 such certifications prior to launch.
- Longer season of operation -- in 2015 we operated from April October. Comparable state stations are
 open only from Memorial Day through Labor Day. In 2015, the longer season allowed us to detect more
 mussel-fouled boats, especially in the April/May timeframe.
- Longer hours of operation -- In 2015, the station operated 12 hours a day, 7 days per week.
- Increased efficiency the station inspects traffic moving both east and westbound. State stations (with one exception) only inspect traffic moving in one direction.
- Greater law enforcement: Stopping at the Highway 2 WIS was mandatory for any watercraft passing the
 station, whether launching on the reservation or off. Failure to stop at the station, routinely resulted in
 local law enforcement escorting errant watercraft owners back to the station for inspection. In addition,
 tickets were issued by Tribal wardens for launching on Blackfeet waters without the requisite certificate of
 inspection.

The pilot project demonstrated that a more robust program can be successfully implemented at the landscape scale.

Area of Concern

The Blackfeet Nation sits east of Glacier National Park and contains over 25 lakes used by boaters for both fishing and recreation. Many rivers drain from the area, which is near the headwaters of the Missouri watershed, including St. Mary River, Two Medicine River, Milk River, Birch Creek and Cut Bank Creek. Total area of the reservation is approximately 3,000 square miles and major access points are from Highway 89 from the north and south, and Highway 2 from the east and west, as well as several other smaller access points (shown on inset below).



SECTION 1: PREVENTION

The adage "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" is a dramatic truism with aquatic invasive species. It is far less costly to prevent introduction of AIS than to pay for control or eradication once an unwanted species becomes established (if control or eradication are even possible).

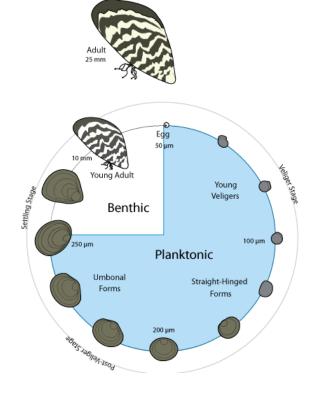
Given that humans are the primary vector for transporting AIS, the success of this strategic plan rests on the ability to intercept AIS fouled watercraft prior to launch. Therefore, public outreach efforts to inform the public of AIS threats while encouraging active participation in prevention efforts is critical. To achieve participation, we must engage organizations and agencies in collaborative planning and action. We must also understand the pathways of introduction so that we may better direct our prevention efforts.

This portion of the implementation plan defines how we will increase awareness and participation in prevention efforts; interrupt introduction pathways of introduction; integrate ongoing management and conservation work; and integrate AIS prevention into effective laws, policies, and criteria to effectively combat AIS.

STRATEGY 1A: Prevent the introduction of new AIS as per Ordinance 113, "Blackfeet Nation Aquatic Invasive Act."

- The Blackfeet Environmental Protection Agency and Blackfeet Fish and Wildlife will work together with other agencies to uphold and implement the goals of the Ordinance.
- Tribal agencies will meet annually to review Ordinance 113 and the Blackfeet AIS Strategy to determine if any changes are needed.
- Tribal agencies will meet annually to evaluate progress during the past field season, and to identify actions needed to enhance the AIS prevention program for the forthcoming field season.

Only about 25% of zebra and quagga mussels life stages involve attaching to hard surfaces. Juvenile mussels, called veligers, as well as post veligers can live up to 21 days in standing water and must also be considered a threat.



SECTION 1: PREVENTION

STRATEGY 1B: Prevent the introduction of new aquatic invasive species by operating mandatory watercraft inspection stations and certification stations to ensure that all watercraft are inspected prior to launching on Blackfeet waters.

- Operate mandatory watercraft inspection station: Operate mandatory watercraft inspection stations (WIS) at major Reservation entrances to ensure all watercraft travelling through are free of AIS.
- Operate certification stations to (1) provide a heightened level of service to boaters; (2) facilitate program compliance; and (3) to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the AIS prevention effort.
- Work with partnering agencies, including but not limited to: The Flathead Basin Commission, Glacier
 National Park, and the Province of Alberta to create a WIS system that makes it as easy as possible for as
 many boats as possible to be inspected prior to launching on Blackfeet waters.
- Open watercraft inspection stations as early as March to ensure high risk boats returning from winter residences are intercepted and inspected before launching.
- Continue enforcement efforts to enhance program compliance rates.
- Deploy "sniffer dogs" at the inspection stations to detect invasive mussels that are not visible to the human eye.



STRATEGY 1C: Preventing aquatic invasive species by developing a strategic network of cleaning/treatment infrastructure and adopting standard cleaning protocols.

- Purchase a portable pressure washer unit that can be stored at a locked facility on the Reservation.
- Create a network of individuals, on and off-reservation, that are knowledgeable on the use of the hot pressure washer to decontaminate fouled boats; and
- Ensure that a minimum of two people on the Blackfeet Reservation possess Level II Watercraft Inspection Training and are certified to perform full decontaminations in the instance of a mussel fouled boat.

SECTION 2: MONITORING

Without clear knowledge of the location of existing populations of AIS within the Blackfeet Nation, our fight against AIS will be nearly impossible. The earlier a new infestation is detected, the greater the chances of managing and eradicating the AIS. This portion of the Strategic Plan addresses the need for AIS monitoring protocols; annual AIS monitoring; and data storage to monitor trends over time.

STRATEGY 2A: Preventing the introduction of new aquatic invasive species by monitoring for invasive mussels.

- Determine the bodies of water at the highest risk of an infestation of invasive mussels, and develop a monitoring plan with frequency rates and lake-specific monitoring locations.
- Follow the universal sampling protocols for microscopy testing and Environmental DNA (eDNA) testing.
- Create a monitoring database that includes bodies of water sampled; sampling date(s); sampling location(s); methodology used (microscopy and/or eDNA); date for next monitoring event, etc..
- If and when aquatic invasive species are found, develop a Mussel Distribution Map for the Blackfeet Nation.

STRATEGY 2B: Preventing the introduction of new aquatic invasive species by monitoring for invasive plants.

- Determine the bodies of water at the highest risk of an infestation of invasive aquatic plants.
- Follow the universal sampling protocols for presence/absence surveys for aquatic invasive plants.
- Create a monitoring database that includes bodies of water sampled, sampling date(s)/location(s);
 methodology used; date for next monitoring event, etc..
- If and when aquatic invasive species are found, develop an AIS Distribution Map for the Blackfeet Nation, along with containment/eradication plans.

Several invasive plants, like the fragrant water lily, were introduced as decorative plants. These non-native plants have no native predators and can easily colonize a water body. Lake Blanchard, shown here, is suffering from such an introduction. Detecting non-native plants and removing them early on may prevent others from purposefully moving it to another body of water due to its attractive flower.

The thatch rake in the photo is attached to a 25' foot rope. The rake can be thrown into the water to collect plant samples from beneath the water's surface.



SECTION 3: EARLY DETECTION & RAPID RESPONSE

The Blackfeet Nation features many interstate rivers, lakes, and reservoirs. Therefore, a rapid response plan is needed to respond to newly discovered AIS populations. For interstate purposes, the Western Regional Panel Rapid Response Model can be used as the standard operating procedure. However, a framework needs to be established for use within the Reservation to ensure coordination of the rapid response efforts if/when the need arises.

Strategy 3A: Develop and implement a Rapid Response Plan.

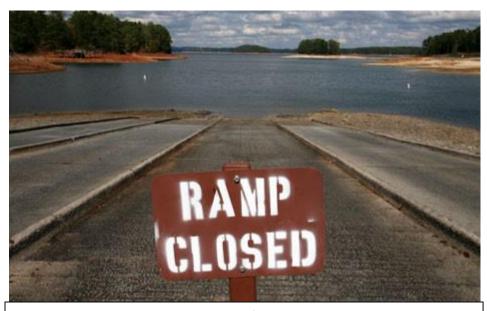
- Convene stakeholders, including but not limited to, Blackfeet Environmental, Blackfeet Fish and Wildlife
 and Browning Police to review the Western Regional Panel Rapid Response Model. Transboundary and
 interstate issues should be addressed within the rapid response plan, as well as local response needs.
- Develop a Chain of Command to enact the Rapid Response plan if the need arises.

Strategy 3B: Test the Rapid Response Plan

- Convene the Rapid Response partners and complete a Table Top exercise to ensure all key players are knowledgeable of their roles, and that the Plan is timely and effective.
- Amend the Plan as needed based on the outcome of the Table Top exercise.

Strategy 3C: Containment

- Create materials and signage to close a body of water in the event of an AIS infestation.
- Identify designated personnel at the ready for an emergency closure until the Rapid Response plan can be enacted.



The sooner action is taken at a newly infested water body, the greater the likelihood of preventing the spread of AIS. Having temporary signs ready, just in case, is an effective way to avoid such dispersal.

SECTION 4: EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

The Tribe will develop and implement consistent outreach plans to address AIS education throughout the Blackfeet Nation. An informed public, including policy makers, natural resource staff, law enforcement, private industry and outfitters, can better understand their roles in the prevention of aquatic invasive species with consistent messaging. For example, the CLEAN, DRAIN & DRY tag line will make spreading the word about AIS easier for all stakeholders to understand. The following will help us attain that goal.

STRATEGY 4A: Preventing the introduction of new aquatic invasive species by funding an Aquatic Invasive Species Coordinator for the Blackfeet Nation.

- Hire an AIS Coordinator with Level II Watercraft Inspector and Decontamination certification. The AIS Coordinator will:
 - Work with neighboring stakeholders, including Alberta, Glacier National Park and the Flathead
 Basin Commission to better understand AIS in the region.
 - Conduct targeted outreach efforts to policy makers, natural resource workers, law enforcement, private industry and outfitters.
 - Design and maintain a Blackfeet AIS website

STRATEGY 4B: Preventing the introduction of new aquatic invasive species by disseminating education and outreach materials to the general public and engaging local youth.

- Provide AIS information and outreach materials to stakeholders including fishing license retailers, Blackfeet Fish and Wildlife and outfitters for the purpose of distribution to the general public.
- Provide AIS outreach materials to the watercraft inspection stations and ensure that the inspectors are distributing the information to all watercraft coming through the stations.
- Install AIS signage at all lakes and boat launches.
- Prepare and disseminate public service announcements for radio and TV spots in the region.
- Design and upload an AIS page on the Tribal/Fish and Wildlife/Environmental Protection websites.
- Host field trips at the watercraft inspection station(s) and conduct class presentations on AIS.



This 2" ABS pipe was submerged in Lake Mead for 6 months. This pipe, located at the Highway 2 inspection station demonstrates:

- How quickly mussels can take over a substrate
- How damaging mussels are to irrigation infrastructure
- How to recognize zebra/quagga mussels

NEXT STEPS

STEPS FOR 2016

- The Blackfeet Environmental Protection Agency and Blackfeet Fish and Wildlife will work together with other agencies to uphold the goals of the ordinance.
- Agencies will meet annually to review the Ordinance and the Aquatic Invasive Species Strategy to evaluate
 the Plan's efficiency and the Agencies' implementation plan for the upcoming field season. Ordinance and
 Plan to be amended as needed.
- Amend Ordinance 113 to recognize the Glacier National Park and the Province of Alberta (Coutts)
 watercraft inspections.
- Purchase and install hot water pressure washer at a secure location, if funding permits.
- Two Fish and Wildlife and/or Environmental Protection staff will obtain WIT II Certification, if funding permits.
- Continue enforcement efforts to enhance program compliance rates.
- Design and install highway signage at the major points of entry into the Reservation, if funding permits.
- Operate mandatory watercraft inspection/certification stations at major Reservation entrances and camp grounds to ensure all watercraft travelling through the Reservation is free of AIS.
- Open the watercraft inspection station as early as March to ensure high risk boats returning from winter residences are intercepted before launching.
- Determine the bodies of water at the highest risk of an infestation of invasive mussels, and undertake monitoring at those water bodies.
- Develop monitoring plan to obtain data needed for AIS trend analysis.
- Provide AIS information and outreach materials to stakeholders including fishing license retailers,
 Blackfeet Fish and Wildlife and outfitters for distribution to the general public.
- Provide AIS outreach materials to the watercraft inspection/certification stations for distribution to boaters at stations.
- Develop and install signage at boat launches and camp grounds.
- Design and upload Blackfeet AIS website.
- Create and disseminate public service announcements for TV and radio.
- Seek funding to complete all other Strategies outlined in this plan for years 2017-2020 as noted below.

- Work with partnering agencies, including but not limited to: The Flathead Basin Commission, Glacier National Park, and Province of Alberta (Coutts) to create a system that facilitates boat inspections.
- Deploy "sniffer dogs" at the inspection stations to detect invasive mussels that are not visible to the human eye.
- Create a network of individuals that are knowledgeable on the use of the hot pressure washer to clean boats.
- Two people on the Blackfeet Reservation have Level II Watercraft Inspection Training and are certified to perform full decontaminations in the instance of a mussel fouled boat.
- Follow the universal sampling protocols for microscopy testing and Environmental DNA (eDNA) testing.
- Follow the universal sampling protocols for presence/absence surveys (unless decided otherwise) for aquatic invasive plants
- Create a monitoring database that includes which bodies of water are sampled, when the monitoring took
 place, where they were sampled, what methods were used (microscopy and/or eDNA) and a date for the
 next monitoring.
- If and when aquatic invasive species are found, develop a Mussel/Invasive Plant Distribution Map for the Blackfeet Nation.
- Convene stakeholders, including but not limited to, Blackfeet Environmental, Blackfeet Fish and Wildlife
 and Browning Police to Review the Western Regional Panel Rapid Response Model. Transboundary and
 interstate issues should be addressed.
- Develop a Chain of Command to enact the Rapid Response plan if the need arises.
- Convene the Rapid Response partners to complete a Table Top exercise to ensure all key players are
 knowledgeable of their roles and the Plan is timely and effective; amend the plan as needed based on the
 results of the Table Top exercise.
- Create materials and signage to close a body of water in the event of an AIS infestation and have designated personnel at the ready for an emergency closure until the Rapid Response plan can be enacted.
- Hire an AIS Coordinator with Level II Watercraft Inspector and Decontamination certification.
 - The AIS Coordinator will work with neighboring stakeholders, including Alberta, Glacier National Park and the Flathead Basin AIS Work Group to understand AIS in the region.
 - The AIS Coordinator will conduct outreach efforts to policy makers, natural resource workers, law enforcement, private industry and outfitters.

APPENDIX A: AIS TO LOOK FOR ON THE BLACKFEET NATION

Species	ANS Priority Class ¹	Legal status ²
Fish		l
Asian carp species (bighead, grass, silver, and black)	1	Prohibited
Black bullhead	4	Unclassified
Eurasian ruffe	1	Prohibited
Lake trout	4	Unclassified
Northern snakehead	1	Prohibited
Brook trout	4	Unclassified
Rainbow trout ³	4	Unclassified
Brown trout	4	Unclassified
Largemouth Bass	4	Unclassified
Walleye	4	Unclassified
Northern pike	4	Unclassified
Pumpkinseed	4	Unclassified
Lake Whitefish	4	Unclassified
Round goby	1	Prohibited
Tench	1	Unclassified
Walking catfish	1	Prohibited
Yellow perch	4	Unclassified
White perch	1	Prohibited
Zander	1	Prohibited

¹ Priority classes were adapted from the Statewide ANS Management Plan.

² Classification in Exotic Wildlife Administrative Rules ARM 12.6.2220.

³ Lake trout and rainbow trout do pose significant impacts to native fish within the Flathead River Basin. Management strategies are utilized in some locations to control their populations. Continued management is encouraged and prevention of spread to new areas is essential to limit further impacts to native species.

Amphibians		
African clawed frogs		Prohibited
North American bullfrog		Prohibited
Mollusks	I	<u> </u>
New Zealand mud snail	1	Prohibited
Quagga mussel	1	Prohibited
Zebra mussel	1	Prohibited
Crustaceans		
Rusty crayfish	1	Prohibited
Plants	I	I
Eurasian watermilfoil	3	
Curley leaf pondweed	4	
Flowering rush	4	
Yellow flag iris	4	
Parsites and Pathogens		
VHS virus	1	
Whirling disease	2	
Mammals		
Nutria	1	Prohibited

APPENDIX A (cont.): AIS TO LOOK FOR ON THE BLACKFEET NATION

Priority Class 1

These species are not known to be present within the Flathead Basin, but have a high potential to invade. Limited or no known management strategies for these species exist. Appropriate action for this class includes prevention of introductions and eradication of pioneering populations.

Priority Class 2

These species are present and established within the Flathead Basin and have the potential to spread further. Limited or no known management strategies for these species exist. These species can be managed through actions that involve mitigation of impact, control of population size, and prevention of dispersal to other waterbodies.

Priority Class 3

These species are not known to be established in the Flathead Basin and have a high potential for invasion. Appropriate management techniques are available and include prevention of introductions and eradication of pioneering populations.

Priority Class 4

These species are present and have the potential to spread within the Basin, but management strategies exist for these species and include mitigation of impact, control of population size, and prevention of dispersal to other waterbodies.

PHOTOS of SELECT AIS



Zebra Mussel Photo: USGS



New Zealand Mudsnail Photo: http://www.esg.umt.edu (Actual size: approx. 1mm)



Eurasian Watermilfoil Photo: Heidi Sedivy



Curlyleaf Pondweed Photo: University of Connecticut



FLowering Rush Photo: MT Dept. of Agriculture

APPENDIX B: AIS REFERENCE MATERIALS

Aquatic Invasive Species Threatening the Crown of the Continent. Published in 2013 by the Crown Managers Partnership and can be viewed online at:

 $http://static1.1.sqspcdn.com/static/f/808688/22507895/1366578266593/AIS_guide_final0313_web.pdf?token=3TXIbacPE0Y3BmPPSnLgtQHWNqQ\%3D$

Common Native and Invasive Wetland Plants in Montana. Published in 2012 by the Montana Department of Environmental Quality Wetland Program and can be downloaded online at:

deq.mt.gov/wqinfo/Wetlands/PDFs/WetlandPlantBook.pdf

An Aquatic Plant Identification Manual for Washington's Freshwater Plants. Published in 2001 by the Washington Department of Ecology can be viewed online at:

http://www.ecy.wa.gov/Programs/wq/plants/plantid2/index.html

APPENDIX C: BUDGET NEEDS

Tasks to be completed in 2016 have little to no financial needs, or will only be undertaken if grant funding can be obtained. The following table includes funding needs for tasks to be completed from 2017 to 2020.

Task	Total Cost	Cost Description
Deploy "Sniffer Dogs" to detect mussel fouled boats during the boating season.	First year: \$45,000 per dog Operating costs: Varied depending on total days of deployment.	Initial costs include an intensive dog/trainer instruction in California. Operating costs include time that the dog is deployed, typically about \$30/hour.
Purchase portable pressure washer unit.	\$4,000 to \$30,000	Costs vary depending on: Size of unit Adjustable temperature/pressure Water recycling ability, including containment mat
Operate mandatory watercraft inspection/certification stations at major Reservation entrances and camp grounds to ensure all watercraft travelling through the Reservation are free of AIS.	Approx. \$60,000 annually	Cost includes staffing and operating needs (i.e. storage container, port-a-potty, forms etc.)
Design and install highway signage at the major points of entry into the Reservation	\$21,000	Includes funding for 7 signs at \$2,500 each and \$3,500 for installation.
Provide AIS information and outreach materials to stakeholders including fishing license retailers, Blackfeet Fish and Wildlife, outfitters and WIS personnel for distribution to the general public.	\$8,000	Cost is estimated to print 5,000 copies of three brochures.
Provide WIT II Certification for two Program Staff	\$1,000	Estimated airfare to Lake Mead is \$300/person. Additional costs include lodging and food. Training is free at Lake Mead.
Monitor for invasive mussels	\$7,500 per year	This includes time and materials for 25 lakes. Each eDNA sample is \$75.
Monitor for invasive plants	\$2,500 per year	Includes time to conduct absence/presence surveys at 8 lakes/year.
Create an AIS Distribution Map	\$500	This map can be created before the detection of AIS and updates if/when AIS are found.

Convene Stakeholders for an EDRR Table Top Exercise	\$1,000	Includes time to coordinate and develop exercise for stakeholders.
Create closure signage necessary to enact the EDRR Plan in the event of a mussel fouled lake.	\$1,000	Signs will be posted at beginning of access roads and at the lake.
Hire an AIS Coordinator	\$33,000 per year	Cost is for one full-time position.