

Where's your invasive species sticker, bud?

Jim Fisher

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With all the time Idaho legislators have wasted this year doing nothing, you might think that when they actually accomplished something they could get it right - or at least get it complete.

If you did think that, though, the state's new law aimed at curtailing quagga mussels and other living threats to Idaho waterways would prove you wrong. The law is a one-page imposition of annual fees on boaters, those relying on human power as well as engine power, with no good way of collecting or enforcing the requirement, let alone any indication of what will be done with what money the fees do bring in.

As reader Art Seamans pointed out in a letter on this page Monday, however reasonable it may be to charge boaters for the cost of fighting invasive species, the mechanism for collecting the fees is anything but well-thought-out. Rather than building on the existing registration system for powerboats, the law requires all boaters to make a separate sticker purchase.

For in-state powerboaters, the cost is \$10. For out-of-state powerboaters, it is \$20. And for canoeists, rafters and other users of human-powered vessels longer than 10 feet, it is \$5.

Where are the stickers available? To date, only at the Parks and Recreation Department in Boise, from which they may be bought online or by mail. There are as yet no local vendors.

As Seamans says, that poses an inconvenience for Idaho boaters, but for those from outside the state it's an unexpected burden. Can legislators really expect to hold visitors responsible for purchase of stickers they can't get during a brief visit?

And who is going to hold them, or anyone else, responsible? The law doesn't say.

Yet supposedly everyone who launches a raft or canoe 10 feet or longer to float down the Clearwater River on a summer afternoon is expected to have an invasive species sticker attached to the craft. Any guesses what percentage will?

Now, about preventing quagga and zebra mussels from contaminating Idaho waters the way species like Eurasian milfoil already have: How is that going to be accomplished? The law says only that money from the fees will be deposited in the invasive species fund maintained by the Agriculture Department.

Does that mean a department used to dealing with range threats like spotted knapweed and yellow starthistle will now undertake to scrub the undersides of thousands of boats, rafts and canoes to remove mussels? And where will this be done - outside of Boise, that is?

Despite these unanswered questions, legislators thought enough of this law to pass it 63-5 in the House and 34-1 in the Senate, and to attach what's called an emergency clause making it enforceable the moment the governor signed it, which on April 8, Gov. Butch Otter did.

Go figure. - J.F.