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# Officials stunned at size of Tahoe clam invasion

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Peering into cobalt waters, U.S. Sen. John Ensign caught sight of Tahoe's latest threat.

Beneath the hull of a Desert Research Institute boat off Lake Tahoe's southeast shore were visible dense beds of clams.

"It's really shocking to see the numbers," the Nevada Republican said.

Asian clams, first discovered in small quantities in the lake in 2002, have exploded in number. They coat the bottom along much of Tahoe's southeast shore in depths of 3 to 30 feet, in some cases up to 3,000 clams per square yard.

The dime-sized clams are believed to have caused a dense algae bloom at the lake last summer and experts fear they could change water chemistry to allow other invaders, highly damaging quagga or zebra mussels, to thrive at the lake.

DRI President Stephen Wells, who until recently only had seen pictures of the clams, was taken aback.

"I had no idea they would be in that concentration. It's really bad," Wells said.

Participants in the annual Tahoe summit Aug. 13 agreed that clams, mussels, weeds and other invading species -- either already at the lake or threatening to arrive -- could pose a huge danger to Tahoe, the Truckee River and Pyramid Lake.

During the event, Nevada Gov. Jim Gibbons joined California Natural Resources Secretary Mike Chrisman and top officials with the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency in signing a management strategy for aquatic invasive species.

"It's a constant assault on the lake," Ensign said. "This is another battle. It seems like every time we have a victory we have another battle come along."

"We need to get moving," U.S. Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., said. "If we don't get a stranglehold on them, they will get a stranglehold on this lake."

## Additional Facts

Clam invasion

- Nevada and California are teaming up to attack invasive aquatic species posing increasing risks to Lake Tahoe.
- Nevada Gov. Jim Gibbons and California Secretary of Natural Resources Mike Chrisman signed an agreement on Aug. 20 to develop a joint management plan to guide the efforts.
- It was unveiled at the environmental summit that annually brings together scientists, politicians and land managers to get updates on the condition of the lake and new threats to its famed clarity.
- While wildfires and air pollution pose threats to the lake, new research shows a major infestation of non-native Asian clams could cause even more trouble.
- The dime-sized clams are believed to be linked to a major algae bloom last summer. Experts said they could help other invaders like quagga and zebra mussels successfully establish at the lake.