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Lake faced with need for mussel prevention

Canyon Lake boaters will be faced with changes to their routine for entering the community gates if measures recommended by the Lake and Marina Committee to prevent an infestation of quagga/zebra mussels are put into effect. However, the cost to the community will be much greater if they aren't put into effect, as Director Steve Salazar points out, "Though we have yet to quantify the potential damage, it is clear that a mussel infestation would have a very high negative impact on Canyon Lake economically and recreationally. The related costs would significantly impact the Association for years to come. It should be noted that, to date, no effective way to control these pests, once they have entered a body of water, has been developed anywhere in the U.S."

The Lake is the heart of Canyon Lake, and like a human heart, it faces threats to its health that are silent and deadly without proper care and supervision. In some ways, it is already ill, according to water officials, with levels of particular nutrients that violate state water quality standards called TMDL (Total Maximum Daily Load). Specialists contracted by the City of Canyon Lake already are researching ways to improve the health of the Lake and reduce TMDL by 2020.

But there is a more immediate and dangerous threat – like plaque building up in the arteries of a heart – that has the potential of clogging anything and everything coming into continuous contact with the Lake if strict measures aren't taken. Canyon Lakers have read about them in past months and heard about them once again at last week's POA Board meeting – they are the invasive, microscopic quagga/zebra mussels.

The Lake and Marina Committee, based on input from the State of California, the water district and other officials, has concluded that the Property Owners Association should act promptly to prevent the introduction of the mussels into Canyon Lake, saying, "An effective quagga/zebra mussel regime will avoid the following negative consequences that would result from mussel infestation:

- Damage to dam and water treatment facilities
- Damage to inflow, runoff and causeway pipes
- Damage to boat docks and lifts
- Damage to Solar Bees
- Damage to POA and member boats
- Damage to fish and wildlife

"Though we have yet to quantify the potential damage, it is clear that a mussel infestation would have a very high negative impact on Canyon Lake economically and recreationally," says Director Steve Salazar, the Board's liaison to the Lake and Marina Committee. "The related costs would significantly impact the Association for years to come. It should be noted that, to date, no effective way to control these pests, once they have entered a body of water, has been developed anywhere in the U.S."

The committee reports that, due to infestation, the Colorado River is no longer a viable option for replenishment of Canyon Lake. Additionally, mussels have already infested several nearby lakes, including Lake Skinner and Lake Mathews, and the City of Lake Elsinore has determined it will not institute any measures to prevent mussel infestation.

The state and some local authorities have instituted quagga/zebra control programs and boaters who frequent some of these protected venues are generally familiar with the rational for, and the specific requirement of, these programs, according to Steve.

Steve, serving as POA Treasurer, acknowledges there are several challenges the POA must consider before beginning to devise/implement a formalized mussel prevention regime:

1. No budgetary consideration has been given to quagga/zebra prevention. Thus, the POA Board of

Directors will need to determine how to fund any prevention efforts that it may decide to institute.

2. Implementation of a prevention program may be considered a nuisance to boaters who are accustomed to frequently exiting and re-entering Canyon Lake with their boats (e.g., competitive skiers/wake boarders and boaters who want to exit Canyon Lake to re-fuel and immediately return afterwards).

3. A successful program will require ongoing management attention.

4. The area where San Jacinto Creek enters the North Ski Area is outside of the POA's jurisdiction. Thus, the POA will need to interface with the City of Canyon Lake and other third parties to address this issue.

While presenting the Lake and Marina Committee's findings to the Board, Steve pointed out that, due to Canyon Lake's unique geography (with three manned gates controlling access to the entire community) most discussions have centered around the issue of controlling boat access to the private community.

"While in the past there has been some focus on boat ramps, our unique situation affords us the opportunity to implement an effective program at the gates, which should require fewer resources than a program that emphasizes monitoring the launch areas," says Steve.

According to the committee, a potential quagga/zebra prevention program might include the following elements:

• All boats entering or leaving Canyon Lake would use the East Gate.

• Boats entering would be stopped and inspected by a trained POA inspector, with a possible inspection area located at Eastport.

• Any boat found to be wet or contaminated would be either decontaminated or equipped with a quarantine seal and scheduled for re-inspection prior to use on the Lake. Quarantine would be a period of two to 14 days.

• Boats that pass inspection would be authorized for use on the Lake.

• Boats exiting Canyon Lake for storage, fueling or service would be inspected and equipped with a "storage seal."

• Boats entering Canyon Lake with an intact storage seal would be inspected and, if the seal is intact and boat is found to be dry and clean, the seal would be removed and the boat authorized for use on the Lake.

• Any quarantined boat found on the Lake or any seal found to be tampered with would be subject to a $500 fine. If the fine is not paid, the POA would revoke Lake privileges until the fine is settled.

The committee believes a possible area for decontamination is Eastport. At some point, this could include a containment area, 1,400-degree high-pressure wash equipment and a drain connected to the sewer. Offsite, an authorized decontamination facility that issues certificates might be another option.

But the option for a containment facility is down the road. Before that, there are measures that can be implemented without great expense. Steve says he would like to reiterate his comments at the Board meeting that this is a pressing issue that needs to be addressed quickly.

"We must avoid 'death by committee,'" he says. "As I noted, in addition to decisive action, I believe the Association's priorities in implementing a plan should be effectiveness of the program, minimizing inconvenience to membership and minimizing cost."

"Accordingly, I believe we can implement a tiered program that starts with a seal system that enables those who store locally and take their boats outside the gates simply to re-fuel should be able to very easily return to Canyon Lake without inspection," he says. "Those who do not remove their boats from the gates will not be affected by the program. Only those that actually may have launched their boats in another body of water will be significantly affected."

For those significantly affected there is a tiered option, Steve explains. "First, they can simply be inspected and quarantined for several days by, again, simply using a seal system. However, these boats must enter the community at a designated location – probably the East Gate. Only if and when we implement an eradication option would significant resources be required."