

Watercraft inspections

Watercraft inspections are on the front line of Washington’s efforts to keep aquatic invasive species out of state waters. In calendar years 2012-13, AIS field staff inspected a total of 27,373 watercraft, including 83 found to be carrying AIS and decontaminated. Nineteen of those boats were carrying zebra/quagga mussels. Besides intercepting these aquatic invaders, check stations played a key role in raising boat owners’ awareness about the importance of cleaning their watercraft.

Prior to 2008, watercraft inspections were conducted by AIS program non-enforcement staff at boat launches during the high-use boating months in spring and summer. That changed with the Legislature’s adoption of ESSB 5699, which allowed the program to establish mandatory check stations and imposed a recreational boat registration fee to support expanded AIS watercraft inspections.

During the 2011-13 biennium, the AIS program conducted six different types of watercraft inspections, ranging from mandatory check stations to voluntary visual inspections conducted by WDFW Enforcement officers during their regular course of duty. Enforcement officers began reporting these visual inspections for the first time in 2012. Meanwhile, the number of mandatory inspections declined significantly that year, as discussed in the next section.

Inspections are documented by calendar year to avoid splitting data collected during the peak summer boating seasons between two fiscal years.



WDFW Enforcement officers inspect a watercraft at a mandatory check station at a Lake Washington boat ramp.

Mandatory watercraft AIS check stations

Mandatory watercraft AIS check stations are considered the cornerstone of the AIS program. Under state law (now RCW 77.135.120), anyone transporting watercraft must stop and allow the watercraft to be inspected for the presence of AIS whenever check stations are posted as open. In 2012-13, these inspections were generally conducted by WDFW Enforcement officers and one AIS program non-enforcement staff member at each check station.

During those two years, the AIS program conducted a total of 1,474 mandatory watercraft inspections. Of that number, 41 were found to have AIS aboard, including one with a possible infestation of zebra mussels. All were decontaminated.

After four years of steady growth in mandatory check stations, the program conducted just 411 mandatory watercraft inspections in 2012, the lowest number since 2008. This was primarily due to funding limitations noted in the previous section and a structural change in the management of the check stations. Starting in 2012, administration of the mandatory check stations was decentralized, requiring a new level of coordination among WDFW’s six regional offices.

In 2013, the number of mandatory inspections rebounded to 1,063, slightly surpassing the previous record of 1,040 in 2011. By then, the regional administrative system was in place and the program’s biennial funding levels – while still a concern – were better known. The increase in check stations was also supported by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which provided a one-time grant of \$20,000 to reduce the risk posed by vessels leaving Lake Mead and other infested waters in the Southwest.

Mandatory Watercraft Inspections		
Type	2012	2013
Mandatory Check Station	411	1,063
WA State Patrol	43	11
<i>Total</i>	<i>454</i>	<i>1,074</i>
Voluntary Watercraft Inspections		
Type	2012	2013
Boater Survey	64	17
Integrated Safety/AIS	533	541
Requested	9	17
WDFW General Law Enforcement	12,086	12,578
<i>Total</i>	<i>12,692</i>	<i>13,153</i>

Integrated boater safety/AIS inspections

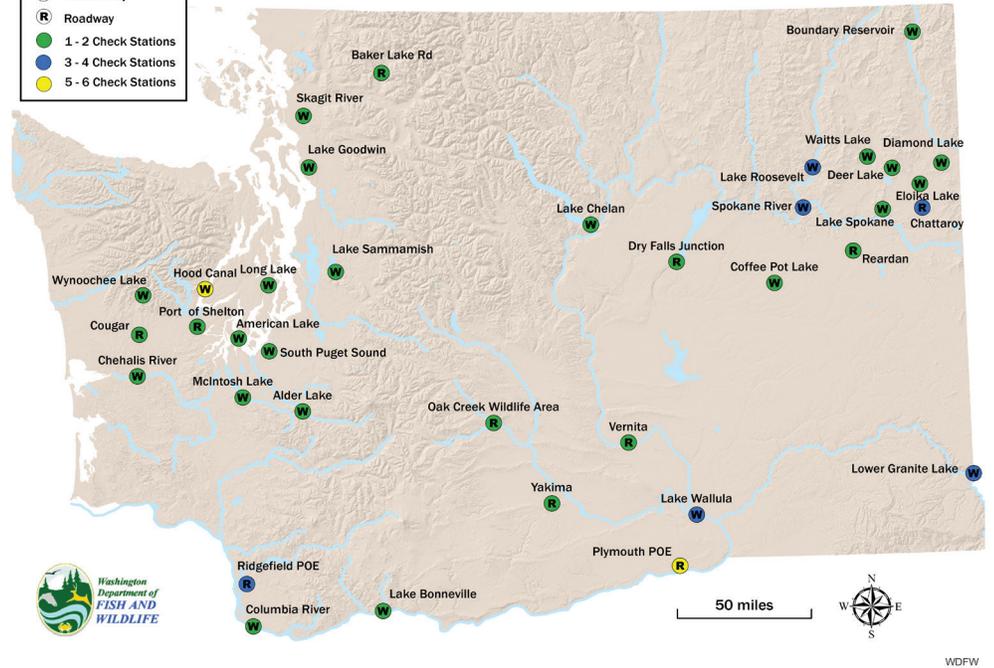
In 2008, WDFW Enforcement officers also started checking for AIS while conducting watercraft safety inspections at boat launches and on the water. Boater participation in the AIS portion of these inspections, which are conducted year-round, is voluntary. A combined boating safety and AIS watercraft inspection form allows officers to conduct both types of inspections simultaneously, documenting a watercraft’s residency, maintenance habits, and movements.

During integrated boater safety/AIS inspections conducted in calendar years 2012-13, WDFW officers inspected a total of 1,074 watercraft and detected AIS aboard 15 of them.

Legend

- W Water Body
- R Roadway
- 1 - 2 Check Stations
- 3 - 4 Check Stations
- 5 - 6 Check Stations

Mandatory Check Stations, 2012-13



State Patrol ports of entry inspections

The Washington State Patrol (WSP) inspects watercraft – primarily oversized commercially hauled vessels – at “port of entry” weigh stations year around. These weigh stations are located in Spokane, Cle Elum, Ridgefield, Blaine and Plymouth on key interstate highways – all likely entry points for AIS transported from out of state.

WSP inspected 54 watercraft in 2012-13 and found 16 carrying AIS, including 13 carrying zebra/quagga mussels. Because commercial haulers often lack knowledge of where the boats they are transporting on contract have last been used, data gathered on the boats’ residency, maintenance habits and movements was limited.

Requested inspections

The public can request a free watercraft inspection any time of the year by calling a toll-free AIS hotline access number (1-888-933-9247). These requests are often made by boat owners who want to make sure their watercraft are free of AIS before transporting them out of state. Neighboring states also call to alert the program of watercraft destined for Washington state that are suspected of being contaminated with AIS.

In 2012-13, AIS program staff inspected 26 watercraft by request and found that 11 had AIS aboard. Six of those vessels were contaminated with zebra/quagga mussels. Data gathered from the inspections include the watercraft’s residency, maintenance habits, and movements.

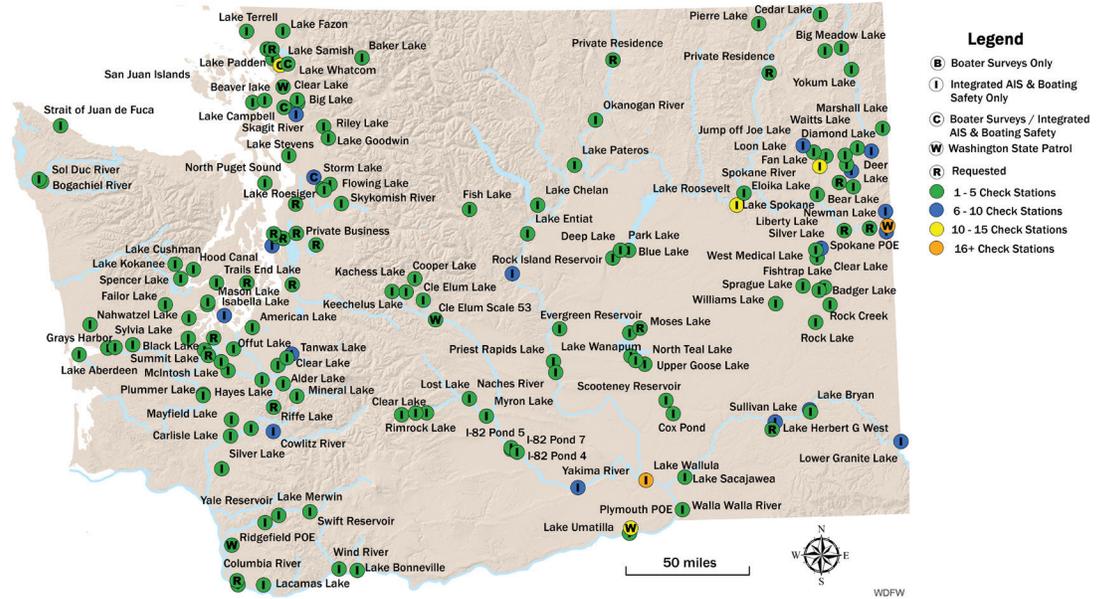


An AIS-infested boat is decontaminated in Spokane using a hot-water pressure washer.

Non-Mandatory Check Stations, 2012-13

Boater surveys

AIS program staff conduct voluntary boater surveys during the high-use watercraft season to assess the residency, maintenance habits, and movements of boats at recreational boat launches. During these surveys, boat owners are also asked to participate in a voluntary inspection of their watercraft. In 2012-13, staff inspected 81 boats, but detected no AIS aboard.



General law enforcement watercraft patrol

For nearly a decade, WDFW Enforcement officers have routinely checked watercraft they encounter for AIS during the course of their regular duties. In 2012, for the first time, officers began reporting those contacts as a component of the department’s overall AIS watercraft inspection program. In 2012-13, they performed 24,664 visual watercraft inspections, accounting for a majority of the total number of voluntary inspections conducted during those two years.

These visual inspections are conducted in the field, typically on low-risk vessels that have not recently been used outside the state. While less thorough than those conducted at mandatory check stations, they do provide a broad sampling of potential risks and a key opportunity to engage boaters on the importance of cleaning their watercraft.

When officers detect AIS aboard watercraft, they generally report their findings on watercraft inspection or integrated safety/AIS inspection forms.

WDFW ‘emphasis’ patrols

In addition to watercraft inspections, WDFW Enforcement officers periodically conduct “emphasis” patrols to target specific AIS risks. These patrols, under the direction of the Deputy Chief of Enforcement, serve to not only enforce the state’s AIS laws but also to educate the public about AIS and change illegal behavior.

In 2012, WDFW Enforcement conducted a year-long emphasis patrol designed to break up the illegal importation of crayfish in northwest Washington. After observing shipments of live crayfish banned under state law, the WDFW Marine Division organized emphasis patrols to investigate the importation of prohibited species by

food establishments. Multiple inspections were made of commercial shipping facilities as well as restaurants in Snohomish, King and Pierce counties.

Several restaurants and commercial shippers were found to be in violation of state law, and several shipments of crayfish were seized and either destroyed or returned to the state of origin. Business owners received warnings and information about how to come into compliance.

Officers followed up almost a year later and found compliance levels greatly improved, although one store was still importing prohibited crayfish and refused to cooperate



Illegal crayfish seized during a WDFW emphasis patrol.

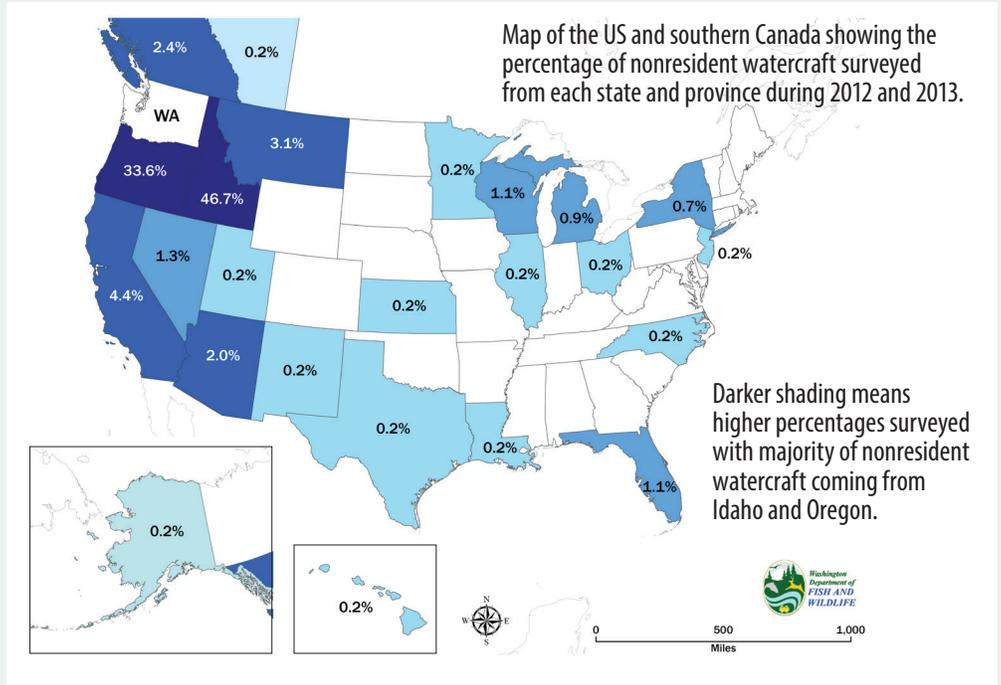
during the follow-up inspection. Felony charges were filed against the owner, who was convicted of violating state law, fined \$3,000, and sentenced to a day in jail.

Watercraft analysis

Aquatic invasive species can enter Washington’s waters through a variety of pathways, hitchhiking on everything from seaplanes and ocean-going tankers to outdoor gear and pets’ fur. However, none of these vectors presents a greater risk than the overland transport of watercraft into – and within – the state.

To better understand those risks, the AIS program collected data on all watercraft inspected in 2012-13, except those checked during general law enforcement patrols. That data documents the residency, movements and maintenance habits of the 2,709 watercraft inspected at 180 unique sites. Findings include:

- 457 watercraft (17%) were registered outside the state of Washington.
- Nonresident watercraft were registered in 22 states, 14 of which have infestations of zebra/quagga mussels.
- 10 of those states – plus two Canadian provinces – are located west of the continental divide.
- While half of the nonresident watercraft came from states east of the continental divide, they comprised only 5% percent of the total number of those inspected.
- 8 percent of the total number of watercraft inspected was registered in Arizona, California, Nevada and Utah, all known to have infestations of quagga/zebra mussels.



Inspections link watercraft to waters with zebra/quagga mussels

Of the 2,709 watercraft inspections, 253 provided information on the last water body visited outside of Washington state.

The top five were:

- Lake Coeur d’ Alene, ID (41)
- Priest Lake, ID (36)
- Willamette River OR (26)
- Lake Pend Oreille ID (14)
- Lake Mead, NV (10)

Nine of the 71 lakes last visited by the 253 watercraft for which data is available are known to have zebra/quagga mussels. They are:

- Lake Erie OH
- Lake Minnetonka, MN
- Lake Havasu AZ
- Lake Pleasant, AZ
- Lake of Ozarks, MO
- Lake Powell, AZ
- Lake Mead, NV
- Lake St. Claire, MI
- Lake Michigan, MI



Information about the new Watercraft Passport is available at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/ais/>

Watercraft contaminated by AIS (Number and % of boats per year)

