

# Protecting Washington from invasive species and toxic algae

SB 5036 & HB 1395: Eliminating expiration dates for the derelict vessel and invasive species removal fee



**Problem:** Aquatic invasive species are causing increasing damage to Washington's land, water, fish and wildlife. Without natural predators, these invaders can displace native animals, destroy natural habitat and cause billions of dollars of damage to public infrastructure, such as irrigation systems and hydroelectric dams. Freshwater algae, another noxious organism, poses a threat to human health as well to wildlife, domestic animals and the natural environment.

Funding for state programs designed to control these harmful species is scheduled to expire June 30, 2012. Without legislative action, current efforts to detect and respond to invasive species and toxic freshwater algae blooms will be discontinued.



The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) operates the Aquatic Invasive Species Prevention and Enforcement program with the support of a \$2 annual vessel-registration fee. Since 2006, WDFW has intercepted more than 20 boats infested with zebra and quagga mussels, two of the most destructive aquatic invasive species threatening the state. But other invasive species, such as nutria, tunicates, New Zealand mudsnails, and European green crabs already have established themselves in Washington, presenting an ongoing threat to the state's environmental and economic vitality.

Since 2005, the Department of Ecology (Ecology) has relied on a \$1 annual vessel-registration fee, available through the Freshwater Aquatic Algae Control Account, to support its efforts to control toxic freshwater algae blooms. These efforts have resulted in cleaner water draining into rivers and Puget Sound. In addition, Ecology's toxicity testing program identifies harmful algae blooms and gets timely information to the public about blooms to protect the health of people, their pets, and livestock.

**Proposed solution:** WDFW and Ecology – with the support of the Recreation and Conservation Office, the Puget Sound Partnership and the State Patrol – are seeking legislation to rescind the expiration date for fees that support the aquatic invasive species and aquatic algae control programs.

SB 5036 would allow the aquatic algae control account to be used to establish contingency funds to pay for emergent aquatic algae issues, as well as to maintain the aquatic algae control program. It would allow grants from the account to be used for freshwater and saltwater nuisance algae. In freshwater, funds would pay for measures to control nuisance algae. In saltwater, funds could pay for removal of nuisance algae. This funding source fills a current gap because there is no funding source to address non-native marine algae species such as *Caulerpa taxifolia*, a highly invasive green algae that was found in California in 2000. The account would allow the state to respond to local government requests help pay for periodic saltwater nuisance algae blooms.

**Benefits:** Early detection and response to invasive species can minimize environmental damage and save the state hundreds of millions of dollars per year in potential costs. Management of toxic algae blooms also protects the health of people, their pets, and livestock.

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# Protecting Washington from invasive species and toxic algae— Proposal detail:

## Maintain WDFW's AIS Prevention and Enforcement Programs

WDFW's Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) Prevention and Enforcement Programs have been highly effective since established by the legislature in 2005. Some of the department's accomplishments under these programs include:

- **Early Detection Monitoring** – Hundreds of high-risk water bodies are annually surveyed statewide for juvenile and adult zebra and quagga mussels.
- **Rapid Response** - Twenty-two recreational watercraft have been intercepted in the state since 2006 with zebra, quagga, or other Dreissena mussels attached – all were decontaminated.
- **Watercraft Inspections** - Over 12,500 watercraft have been inspected since 2007 through boater surveys, integrated AIS/boater safety inspections, WSP Port of Entry weigh station inspections, and at mandatory AIS check stations.
- **State and Regional Coordination** - The department closely coordinates with the Washington Invasive Species Council, the Aquatic Nuisance Species Committee, the Columbia River Basin Team, and the Aquatic Nuisance Species Western Regional Panel to address state and regional issues.

Detailed information regarding program accomplishments can be found in two biennial reports available online at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/ais/>.

## Background

In 2005, the Washington Legislature amended RCW 88.02.050 (2005 c 464) to increase the vessel renewal fee by \$5 per applicant. Of the \$5:

- One dollar and fifty cents went to the newly created Aquatic Invasive Species Prevention Account administered by WDFW.
- Fifty cents went to the AIS Enforcement Account, administered by the State Patrol.
- One dollar went to establish the Freshwater Aquatic Algae Control Account (FAACA) administered by Ecology. The FAACA supports financial and technical assistance to local and state governments, tribes, and special purpose districts to manage excessive freshwater algae.
- Two dollars went to the Derelict Vessel Removal Account administered by the Department of Natural Resources.