# Sample Press Release upon Discovery of Dreissenid Mussels in the CRB

100th Meridian Initiative logo

Date

Lead agency contact information:

On [date], [agency] received a report that live zebra [and/or/quagga] mussels were present in \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. This report has been initially verified by [agency/recognized expert], and efforts are underway to [describe what’s next, if anything, to confirm i.d.].

This discovery is a serious environmental and economic concern for the Pacific Northwest. Zebra mussels are small nonnative freshwater mollusks that have caused major problems in the eastern United States after their introduction in the 1980s.

[Insert quote from a lead agency administrator]

Officials have not yet determined how these mussels arrived to the Pacific Northwest. Recreational boats are known to be a major source of zebra mussel spread in the United States, and there are numerous past incidents where boats fouled by live invasive mussels have been intercepted prior to launching in Northwest waters. [If quagga mussels are found/suspected, insert information on the Colorado River invasion].

Under the national 100th Meridian Initiative campaign, regional aquatic invasive species experts have been preparing for this unfortunate incident, and recently completed a rapid response plan for zebra and quagga mussels in the Columbia River Basin. As called for by this Plan, agencies are coordinating activities such as measuring the extent of invasion, evaluating control options, and initiating measures to prevent further spread.

[Insert more details on specific next steps for surveys, etc.]

Background on Zebra and Quagga Mussels:

Zebra mussels are native to Eastern Europe. They were introduced into the Great Lakes area in the late 1980s, likely via ballast water from commercial ships. They have since rapidly spread throughout the eastern United States and Canada.

Zebra mussels are freshwater bivalve mollusks that typically have a dark and white (zebra-like) pattern on their shells, but may be any combination of colors from off-white to dark brown. Zebra mussels are usually about an inch or less long, but may be larger. When healthy, they attach to hard substrates.

Until the mid-1980s there were no zebra mussels in North America. That changed when they were inadvertently introduced into waters near the Great Lakes region. It is suspected that zebra mussels hitched a ride in ballast water tanks of commercial ships. Zebra Mussels were first discovered in the United States in Lake St. Clair near Detroit, Michigan in 1988. Since the 1980s, zebra mussels have spread, unchecked by natural predators, throughout much of the eastern United States. They currently infest much of the Great Lakes basin, the St. Lawrence Seaway, and much of the Mississippi River drainage system. The have begun to spread up the Missouri River and Arkansas River. In 2008 zebra mussels were confirmed in California and Colorado.

Zebra mussels negatively affect the environment by reproducing quickly and in large numbers. Zebra Mussel densities have been reported to be over 700,000 individuals per square meter in some facilities in the Great Lakes area. Zebra mussels are biofoulers that obstruct pipes in municipal and industrial raw-water systems, requiring millions of dollars annually to treat. They produce microscopic larvae that float freely in the water column, and thus can pass by screens installed to exclude them. Monitoring and control of zebra and quagga mussels cost millions of dollars annually. As filter feeders, zebra mussels remove suspended material from the habitat in which they live. This includes the planktonic algae that is the primary base of the food web. Thus, zebra mussels may completely alter the ecology of water bodies in which they invade.

Some estimates of the economic impact of these small mussels to water intake and conveyance facilities in the eastern U. S. are several billion dollars. Much of the existing infrastructure had to be modified or replaced to deal with the prolific mussels that can attach to about every hard surface in contact with raw water supplies. Possibly even more significant, are the monetary impacts they are expected to have on recreation and natural resource values.

It is not certain how great the impact will be in \_\_\_\_\_\_ (the Northwest) but an interagency coordinating group, led by \_\_\_\_\_\_\_, is extremely concerned. Once the zebra mussels become established, it is almost impossible to get rid of them. The best hope is to launch an early, coordinated program to contain the current infestation and hopefully determine a means of control.

The \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (group) is fortunate to have a head start using a rapid response strategy that was developed earlier in anticipation of just this kind of problem. Other similar rapid response programs have been most successful when there was early detection of an invasive species and all of the agencies that had to be involved were able to quickly respond with a well-coordinated plan.

In the meantime, the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (agency) has \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (restricted access) to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (infected location) to help prevent further dispersal of the zebra mussels. The public can help by avoiding the \_\_\_\_ (infected area) and following some good general guidelines. They should clean all boats, trailers, and other equipment after leaving a lake or stream and never release any live organisms into the wild.

Additional information could be added about other species already in the region and how they are being dealt with – Eurasian watermilfoil, New Zealand mudsnails, Asian clam, and kudzu (which showed up in Oregon and was successfully eradicated).

How can boaters help prevent the spread of zebra mussels:  
These aquatic nuisance species can hitch a ride on our clothing, boats, and items used in the water. When visitors go to another lake or stream, the nuisance species can be released. And, if the conditions are right, these introduced species can become established and create drastic results. By following a simple procedure each time boaters leave the water, they can help stop aquatic hitchhikers. Knowing which waters contain nuisance hitchhikers is not as important ---- as doing the procedure every time boaters leave any lake, stream or coastal area:

* Remove any visible mud, plants, fish or animals before transporting equipment
* Eliminate water from equipment before transporting
* Clean and dry anything that came in contact with water (Boats, trailers, equipment, clothing, dogs, etc.)
* Never release plants, fish or animals into a body of water unless they came out of that body of water.

Additional information can be found at [www.westernais.org](http://www.westernais.org).

Possible Quotes:

* “We have been aware of problems zebra mussels have caused in the Great Lakes region and have been working with various agencies organizations since the early 1990s to prevent their introduction into the West.”
* “Although eradication is extremely difficult, our first concern is to contain the zebra mussel infestation within \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ to avoid it being spread to other vulnerable areas.”

“Although the recent discovery of zebra mussels is alarming, we are fortunate to have a Rapid Response Plan available to facilitate a coordinated regional effort to deal with this new invader. “The successes we have seen in other areas were the result of the region’s ability to rapidly respond with a coordinated intense effort.”