



Frequently Asked Questions

1. *What are aquatic invasive species?*

Aquatic invasive species are non-native plants, animals, and pathogens that live primarily in water, thrive in a new environment, and cause economic loss, environmental damage, and harm to human health.

2. *Are there any aquatic invasive species already in Lake Whatcom or Lake Samish?*

Yes. Lake Whatcom is currently home to three submersed aquatic invasive plants including fragrant waterlily, Eurasian watermilfoil, and curly-leaf pondweed, and one invasive bivalve, the Asian clam. Eleven introduced shoreline species are also present along the Lake Whatcom shoreline including purple and garden loosestrife, yellow flag iris, and hairy willow-herb, to name a few. While fragrant waterlily is also found at Lake Samish, many of these other invasives, including Asian clams and Eurasian watermilfoil, have not yet been found in Lake Samish and could easily be transported by boats and trailers.

3. *Why are boat inspections so important and what are inspectors looking for?*

Boat inspections are so important because they can help us to prevent the transport of aquatic invasive species, such as zebra and quagga mussels, to Whatcom County lakes. These mussels are transported on boats travelling from infested waters and can result in significant impacts to lake ecosystems, water quality, and water supply infrastructure, and can make shoreline areas hazardous and uninviting for recreational users and property owners.

To prevent the introduction of these mussels and other aquatic invasive species, inspectors are on the lookout for any animal or plant material on the watercraft that may pose a risk to Whatcom County waters. The inspector will ask you several questions about your boat and launching history and will then visually and physically inspect your boat for any evidence of aquatic invasive species. The hull, trailer, and interior compartments of your boat will be inspected. Inspectors will be ensuring that your boat has been cleaned, drained, and dried because some aquatic invasive species larvae can be transported on damp gear or in standing water.

4. *Is there a fee for inspections and what are the differences between an Annual Permit and a 3-Day Pass?*

The Lake Whatcom Management Program will be charging fees for inspection and decontamination services that will be used to partially fund the Aquatic Invasive Species Program. Boat owners/operators have the option of purchasing an Annual Permit or a 3-Day Pass (depending on the type of watercraft and whether it requires registration).

- For watercraft that are motorized or require registration by Washington State (or another state or Canadian province) you can purchase either an Annual Permit or a 3-Day Pass. Annual Permits can be purchased for \$50 and include unlimited inspection and re-sealing services (expires at the end of the calendar year). 3-Day Passes can be purchased for \$20 and include unlimited inspection and re-sealing services for up to 3 consecutive days.
- For non-motorized watercraft, including canoes and kayaks, you can purchase an Annual Permit for \$10. This permit fee covers unlimited inspections and expires at the end of the calendar year.

Decontamination services are not included in the permit/pass fees. Permits and passes can be purchased at the time of inspection (by debit/credit card) or online at: <http://www.cob.org/services/payments.aspx>. If you

purchase your permit online, you will need to print your receipt and bring it with you to your inspection as proof of payment.

New AIS Online Education Tutorial and Exam - Coming Soon!

If you are purchasing an Annual Permit, you may be eligible for a \$10 discount (for each watercraft you own) upon successful completion of an online education tutorial and exam (available starting in April, 2014).

Annual Permits will be valid through December 31 of the year they are purchased and will need to be visible on the bow of the boat next to the state registration number (when present) so that permit numbers can be recorded and tracked by the inspector on duty.

Permits are not required for surfboards, paddleboards, and kite boards; float tubes and water sport toys; and inflatables that are 10 feet or less in length (2014).

5. *How long does an inspection take and what should I expect when I arrive at the inspection station?*

Inspections are done on a first come, first-served basis and can take anywhere from five to 15 minutes depending on the complexity of the boat and how prepared you come. Remember to clean, drain, and dry your boat after every use - including the engine outdrive, bilge, ballast tanks, live wells and storage compartments. Clean up any oil, dirt or debris inside bilges and storage compartments, and remove all items inside these compartments prior to arriving for your inspection. If you follow these simple steps, your inspection will be completed very quickly.

When you arrive at the inspection station, an inspector will greet you and ask you several questions about your boat and launching history. They will then visually and physically inspect your boat for any evidence of aquatic invasive species inside all of the compartments of your watercraft as well as on the outside of your vessel. Once the inspection is complete, the inspector will inform you whether the boat requires decontamination prior to being launched.

Unlimited inspection services are included as part of your permit fees. If you are planning on returning to Lake Whatcom on your next visit, we encourage you to get your boat tethered to the trailer prior to leaving the launch area to speed up the inspection process on your next visit (See 14. for details). If you are just coming to Lake Whatcom for the day or for the weekend, we encourage you to purchase a 3-Day Pass which includes unlimited inspection and re-sealing services for up to 3 consecutive days.

6. *What are the inspection station hours of operation at Bloedel Donovan?*

The Bloedel Donovan Boat Inspection Station will be opened from 5am to dusk starting on April 26 and going through September 30. Inspection services will be available starting at 5am up until an hour before sunset. Bloedel Donovan boat launch will be gated outside of these hours of operation.

7. *Will there be additional inspection stations operating in 2014?*

Yes. Additional aquatic invasive species check stations will be operating at the Lake Samish WDFW Boat Launch and the Lake Whatcom South Bay WDFW Boat Launch starting on April 26 and going through September 30. Inspection services will be available at these locations on a weekly basis and hours of operation will be clearly posted. Inspection Days will also be held periodically at the Sudden Valley Marina in 2014.

8. *Do I need to get my boat inspected before going to any other lakes in Whatcom County?*

You currently only need to have your boat inspected prior to launching onto Lake Whatcom or Lake Samish. However, we encourage boaters to clean, drain, and dry their boats between every use, regardless of the water body they are planning on visiting. Always come prepared to have your boat checked as aquatic invasive species inspectors may also be setting up random check stations at other Whatcom County lakes.

9. *Are 2-stroke engines allowed to launch on Lake Whatcom?*

The operation of all carbureted two-stroke auxiliary sailboat engines, all carbureted two-stroke engines of 10 horsepower or less, and all electronic fuel injected two-stroke engines originally purchased before August 2004 is prohibited.

More information:

City of Bellingham Ordinance 2005-06-045

Whatcom County Ordinance 2004-02

10. *What can I do to make my boat inspection a quick and simple process?*

Make sure your boat is cleaned, drained, and dried before showing up at the inspection station. Remove any gear or equipment from internal compartments ahead of time and make sure all compartments are clean, drained, and dry. Consider only using your boat at Lake Whatcom or Lake Samish this season and you can participate in our Wire Seal Program and go through an expedited inspection process on your next visit.

11. *How long should I let my boat dry between uses?*

Make sure your boat is cleaned, drained, and allowed to dry for as long as possible between every use. If you have been in a waterbody that is infested with zebra and/or quagga mussels, we recommend that you allow your boat to dry for at least 30 days and that you get your boat decontaminated using high pressure, 140 degree water prior to launching.

12. *If I only boat in freshwater, do I have to wash my boat between uses?*

Yes. We are most concerned about invasive species spreading from one freshwater body to another so it is important to wash your boat between every use.

13. *What is a boat decontamination and how long does it take?*

Boat decontaminations are conducted when a boat does not pass inspection and is thought to be carrying something that poses a threat to Lake Whatcom or Lake Samish. The Lake Whatcom Management Program is offering several different decontamination options for boaters depending on the level of decontamination required.

- For boats that are coming from local waterbodies and are found to be carrying plant fragments, inspectors will remove the fragment and clean the area in question onsite for no charge.
- For boats that require a higher level of decontamination or that may have been in infested waters, boat owners/operators will be required to take their boat to the decontamination station on Nevada Street to get it decontaminated by our staff for a fee of \$25. The decontamination will involve the boat and its systems being flushed using 140 degree water to destroy any possible remaining invasive species that might pose a risk to Lake Whatcom. Decontaminations at this station should last approximately 30 minutes.
- For more complex boats with internal ballast tanks or bladders (e.g. wakeboard boats), we encourage boat owners/operators to take these vessels to the marina for a more thorough decontamination to be conducted at the owner's expense.

14. *I only use my boat at Lake Whatcom; do I have to get it inspected every time I launch?*

No. If you only use your boat at Lake Whatcom and you launch from Bloedel, you can get an inspector to tether your boat to your trailer as you exit at the launch. If that tether is still intact when you return to the launch on your next visit, you can go in the "sealed boats only" lane and avoid long inspection lines. The inspector will have you stop at the stop sign and will ask you some brief questions and will write down your permit number and the seal number before breaking the tether and sending you down to the launch. If there is any sign that the tether has been tampered with you will have to get your boat re-inspected before being allowed to launch. If you keep your boat on Lake Whatcom for the entire season, no additional inspection is required.

15. *What are zebra and quagga mussels and why are we concerned about them?*

Zebra and quagga mussels are very small freshwater bivalve mollusks that are native to the Caspian, Black, and Aral seas of Eurasia. They were first discovered in North America in 1988 in Lake St. Clair and are thought to

have been introduced via ship ballast water. Since that time, they have infested hundreds of waterbodies across the United States resulting in damaged and fouled recreational equipment, clogged water intake pipes impeding flows to municipal water supplies, and causing irreversible damage to native aquatic ecosystems. Where they have become established, these mussels have resulted in billions of dollars in damages and estimated annual control costs are at least \$1 billion nationwide. For the most current map of infested waterbodies, visit:

http://nas.er.usgs.gov/taxgroup/mollusks/zebramussel/maps/current_zm_quag_map.jpg

16. *How did quagga and zebra mussels get to the Western US?*

Zebra and quagga mussels primarily move from one place to another through human-induced activities. They attach to hard surfaces and can survive out of water for up to 30 days under the right conditions. The microscopic larvae can also be transported in bilges, ballast water, live wells or other equipment that holds water. In January of 2007, authorities discovered quagga mussels in Lake Mead, over 1,000 miles from the nearest infested waterbody. It is thought that they were originally brought to Lake Mead on the hull of a recreational boat travelling from the eastern United States. Since then, additional bodies of water have been infested as a result of contaminated boats travelling from Lake Mead to uninfested waters in the western United States.

17. *Where is the nearest lake infested with zebra or quagga mussels?*

The nearest lakes that have been listed as positive for quagga mussel larvae are Lahontan and Rye Patch Reservoirs in Nevada and the nearest lakes that are currently infested with adult zebra and quagga mussels are San Justo Reservoir in California (zebra mussels) and Lake Mead, Arizona/Nevada (quagga mussels).

18. *How long can zebra and quagga mussels live out of the water?*

The amount of time that zebra and quagga mussels can live out of the water varies depending upon the temperature and the humidity. However, it is recommended that boats are allowed to dry for a minimum of 30 days to kill any mussels that may have inadvertently hitched a ride on your boat. Be sure to check any internal compartments for moisture as these areas may be providing a moist environment for the mussels to survive. While the science on mussel survival out of water is always being updated, a quarantine calculator has been developed by the 100th Meridian Initiative that can be viewed here.

<http://www.100thmeridian.org/emersion.asp>

19. *How long can zebra and quagga mussel larvae live out of the water?*

Similarly to the adult mussels, mussel larvae can live for up to 30 days out of the water under moist conditions and moderate temperatures. These larvae are microscopic but can easily hitch a ride in any internal compartments or internal ballast tanks holding contaminated water. Be sure to check any internal compartments for moisture and ensure that these areas have been cleaned, drained, and dried before launching in uninfested waters.

20. *What would happen if zebra and quagga mussels were introduced to Lake Whatcom or nearby lakes and streams?*

If zebra and/or quagga mussels were introduced to Lake Whatcom, they could result in serious environmental and economic impacts. These mussels could clog our water intake structures resulting in impeded flows to our water treatment facility and could result in long-term taste and odor issues in our drinking water supplies. Additionally, these mussels have the ability to foul and damage recreational boats and boating equipment and could reduce lakefront property values and make shoreline areas hazardous for recreational users and wildlife. They could also result in serious ecological damages by displacing, fouling, and outcompeting native species, altering nutrient cycles and food webs in the lake, and spreading toxic algal blooms and pathogens. All of these costs could result in millions of dollars in damages and associated control costs if these mussels were to become established in Lake Whatcom.

21. Can we get rid of zebra and quagga mussels if Lake Whatcom or Lake Samish become infested?

Probably not. If Lake Whatcom or Lake Samish were to become infested with zebra and/or quagga mussels, it would result in ongoing management costs for our community together with a change in how we view our water resources. There are very few examples of successful eradication efforts. Managing populations in targeted areas and minimizing their spread to other locations would be the goal. Prevention is the best solution!

22. How is this program being funded?

This program is being partially funded by inspection and decontamination fees. Additional funding comes from the Lake Whatcom Water and Sewer District, the City of Bellingham, and Whatcom County.

23. Have aquatic invasive species been found on boats in Whatcom County?

Our Aquatic Invasive Species Check Station in 2013 intercepted 83 boats that were found to be transporting vegetation that had to be removed prior to the boats being allowed to launch. Several of these boats were found to be transporting invasive aquatic plants such as brazilian elodea and curly-leaf pondweed. Additionally, there were 45 cases where boats were found to be carrying standing water on board. Inspectors required these boats to be drained or towel dried prior to allowing the watercraft to launch. No boats stopping at the check station were found to be transporting invasive mussels in 2013.

24. What are the boating rules for Lake Whatcom and Lake Samish?

Follow the speed limits

- 6 mph at all times, if you are within 300 feet of docks and the shore, or within 100 feet of a swimmer, diver, or any non-motorized boat.
- 8 mph from one-half hour after sunset to one-half hour before sunrise.
- 40 mph during daylight hours in unrestricted areas.

Remember who has the right-of-way

Swimmers, divers, and fallen skiers have the right-of-way over any watercraft. Similarly, a sailboat, rowboat, canoe, kayak, or any other non-motorized vessel has the right-of-way over any motor-powered vessel underway.

Carry safety equipment at all times

Personal flotation devices (PFDs) or “life jackets” that are U.S. Coast Guard approved are required to be aboard for each passenger. Children under the age of 7 must always wear a PFD when aboard any boat, motorized or not. All motorized vessels must carry an approved fire extinguisher and, if over 16 feet in length, a whistle.

Know who to call if there's an emergency

The Whatcom County Sheriff's Office enforces boating regulations on Lake Whatcom. A deputy Sheriff patrols the lake on weekends during the boating season. If there's an emergency or a problem on the lake, call 911.

Follow age requirements

You must be at least 16 years old to operate motorized watercraft with an engine that is 10 horsepower or more without an adult on board (even if you have a Boater Education Card). You must be at least 10 years old to operate a motorized watercraft with an engine that is under 10 horsepower. As of 2013, boat operators who are 12 to 50 years of age are required to have a Boater Education Card to operate a motorized watercraft with an engine that is 15 horsepower or more.

Follow engine, horsepower, and permit requirements

Some lakes have more restrictive boating and fishing requirements. It is your responsibility to learn their restrictions before you go fishing or boating.

Lake Whatcom (5,000 acres)

Aquatic invasive species inspection and permit sticker required. Boat launch at Bloedel Donovan Park on the north end, and WDFW launch at south end (Discover Pass required). Use of all carbureted two-stroke engines and electronic fuel injected two-stroke engines prohibited. No wake zone in South Bay.

Lake Samish (814 acres)

Aquatic invasive species inspection and permit sticker required. WDFW boat launch on east side (Discover Pass required) and County Park with dock on north end. No engine or horsepower restrictions. No wake zone under county bridge located by Lake Samish Park.

Prevent the transport of aquatic invasive species

All watercraft are required to be inspected for aquatic invasive species and to display a valid aquatic invasive species permit sticker prior to launching and while operating on Lake Whatcom or Lake Samish (BMC 12.12.280 and WCC 2.27A). Failure to comply with these requirements can result in penalties of up to \$1,000. All watercraft should come prepared for mandatory inspections at these locations.

Protect the shoreline from erosion

Prevent erosion by slowing down to "no wake" speed when close to the shoreline. Wakes from boats and personal watercraft (PWC) can lead to larger, more frequent waves on shore that erode the shoreline impacting fish and wildlife habitat and resulting in reduced lakefront property values.

25. What does the law say about aquatic invasive species?

The transport and release of aquatic invasive species into waters within the jurisdictions of the City of Bellingham and Whatcom County is prohibited. City and County staff are authorized to conduct inspections to prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species into local waters. Any individual who launches a watercraft in violation of local ordinances may face penalties of up to \$1,000 and may be held responsible for the response and mitigation costs expended by the City of Bellingham or Whatcom County. Additionally, the transport of aquatic invasive species into Washington can result in fines of up to \$5,000 and up to a year of jail time. Intentionally bringing aquatic invasive species into Washington can result in even greater fines and jail time.

The City of Bellingham and Whatcom County have revised their aquatic invasive species ordinances in 2014. Starting in 2014, all watercraft will be required to be inspected for aquatic invasive species and to display a valid aquatic invasive species permit sticker prior to launching and while operating on Lake Whatcom or Lake Samish. This new requirement includes non-motorized, hand-carried watercraft such as canoes and kayaks. Permits will not be required for surfboards, paddle boards, and kite boards; float tubes and water sport toys; and inflatables that are 10 feet or less in length.

Regulations:

Whatcom County Code 2.27A

Bellingham Municipal Code 12.12.280

26. Do I need to have my non-motorized canoe, kayak or paddleboard inspected?

Yes. If you are a non-motorized, hand-carried watercraft owner or operator, you will be required to get your watercraft inspected and to purchase an annual permit starting in 2014. You can do your part by cleaning, draining, and drying your watercraft and gear after each use, and properly disposing of any plants or debris that you find either in the trash or above the waterline.

27. What about birds and seaplanes, can they transport aquatic invasive species too?

Aquatic invasive species can be transported through a variety of different vectors that do include wildlife and seaplanes. Staff from the Lake Whatcom Management Program have been in contact with members of the Washington Seaplane Pilots Association to discuss best management practices to prevent the spread of aquatic

invasive species via seaplanes. We are encouraging local seaplane owners to sign a Memorandum of Understanding agreement that they will follow these best management practices to avoid the spread of aquatic invasive species to the lake.

Birds and wildlife can also transport aquatic invasive species from one waterbody to another. This is especially true in areas where there are chains of lakes that are very close to one another and have large migratory bird populations. In the case of Lake Whatcom, it is very unlikely that we would have waterfowl bringing aquatic invasive species to our lake from other infested waters.

There are many vectors that can transport aquatic invasive species that are out of our control, but by inspecting watercraft prior to them launching in the lake, we are able to address one of the most likely pathways for the human-assisted introduction of aquatic invasive species to the lake.

28. How will the program be enforced?

The program is enforced through the permit requirement. Boats launching or on the lake without properly displaying the AIS permit issued upon successful inspection are subject to fines. That said, the program goal is to substantially reduce the chance that quagga or zebra mussels will be released into the lake. To achieve that goal, education and willing community participation is more effective than enforcement.

29. Will there be a grace period during which boaters get a warning before being penalized?

Yes, enforcement is always the last resort and will be applied judiciously. This is a community program that protects citizens from bearing the future burden of living with these invasive species. The City and County are seeking willing participation and compliance.

30. Do people who live on Lake Whatcom or Lake Samish or only use their boats on the lake need to have their boats inspected?

Yes, though once inspected for the year they would need no further inspection as long as their boat remains in the water, at the dock, or on its trailer at the residence. If the boat is to be launched at Bloedel, then it must have an intact wire seal between the boat and trailer to avoid re-inspection.

31. What forms of payment will be accepted for the permits?

You can purchase your permits by debit/credit card at an Aquatic Invasive Species Check Station. We can accept checks and debit/credit cards at our Nevada Street office. Additional payment options are also available at the City's Finance Department at City Hall. You can also purchase Annual Permits online by debit/credit card at www.cob.org/payments.

32. What about event fees?

If you are planning on hosting an event at Lake Whatcom or Lake Samish, such as a bass tournament or a sailing race, you may qualify for a special event pass. Special event passes entitle each event participant to inspection and sealing services for the duration of the event. These passes are subject to terms and conditions of a Special Event Agreement. For more information or to find out if your event qualifies, contact the Boat Inspection Hotline at 778-7975.