

To all Trout Unlimited members in Wyoming,

It is with great pride that I write to you today to inform you of two victories in which I believe WYTU, and all of you, played an important role (OK, we'll give the WGFD some credit, too). On March 10, Governor Dave Freudenthal signed into law two bills that will significantly increase the resources and tools with which Wyoming combats aquatic invasive species and illegal fish stocking.

The first of these bills, House Bill 18 (AIS), provides a number of previously unenforceable measures related to AIS. Not only does it specifically spell out that we don't want AIS in Wyoming, it...

- prohibits the possession, importation, exportation, shipment, transportation, or introduction of AIS,
- provides the Game and Fish Commission and Department of State Parks and Cultural Resources the authority to make rules for and administer check station,
- provides peace officers the legal authority to stop, check, decontaminate, and impound or quarantine almost any conveyance (i.e., anything that has the potential to carry an AIS),
- authorizes Game and Fish and State Parks to create and administer a "boat sticker" program to help fund the AIS Prevention Program (yes, this means boat owners will soon have to pay a fee for an AIS sticker but they're proposing \$10 for WY residents – I think a small price to pay to help keep our waters pristine),
- establishes criminal and civil penalties (don't knowingly introduce an AIS or you could be barred from purchasing a fishing or hunting license for life and be responsible for remediation costs that could easily be in the millions or tens of millions of dollars!), and
- perhaps most importantly, appropriated \$1.5 million to pay for it all!

Although one would hope that many of these things would be common sense, and they are to many of us in TU, most of these items did not exist in WY prior to March 10. Even if a Warden saw a boat covered in quagga mussels, they were powerless to stop it. I know it's hard to believe, but it was true. Now, this is no longer the case.

The second of these bills, Senate File 78 (Illegal Fish Stocking), strengthens the punishments associated with what we might generally call "bucket biology." Previously, illegally stocking fish (e.g., think walleye in Buffalo Bill Reservoir and the devastating effects they are having – by the way, if anyone knows who did that WGFD will give you a \$10,000 reward!) was only a low misdemeanor. In other words, it was a slap on the wrist

with an insignificant fine and short loss of fishing privileges. Now, it is a high misdemeanor wherein a conviction could cost you lifetime loss of fishing privileges and you'll have to pay to clean up the mess (again, this could easily get to be over million and possibly in the tens of millions of dollars!). So unless you can legally keep a fish to eat it or mount it, leave it where you found it. Of course, as a TU member catch and release is a pretty good idea, too.

One of the most amazing things about these bills is that that they were passed in a budget session during a down economy. Governor Freudenthal mandated a no net budget increase or even budget cuts. Considering that, how were we going to find the funds we so desperately need to protect our waters? Yet, when presented with viable bills by fish- and wildlife-friendly legislators, strong testimony and support from WGFD and TU's own Scott Yates, and e-mails and letters of support from TU members like you, the entire legislature and Governor Freudenthal understood the importance of these bills and acted to pass them. The bills moved remarkably swiftly through both the House and the Senate with very few changes and were eagerly signed by the Governor. Thank you and congratulations to all of you who helped this happen!

The only downside to all this good news is that the \$1.5 million appropriation is, by many estimates, not even half of what we really need. I'll be heading to Casper for an AIS Summit hosted by WGFD next week. I hope to come away with some strong ideas on how WYTU can help strengthen the impacts of these bills. I probably won't be able to get all of us deputized so we can stop folks to inspect and quarantine their boats, but I do think there are ways each Chapter can help this money go much farther. Maybe each Chapter can help their Regional Game and Fish Office or State Park with boat wash days, outreach and user surveys, maintain scrub stations? The possibilities may be endless. But, I am certain a coordinated effort will maximize and continue to build upon what we have already accomplished. I look forward to brainstorming and sharing those ideas with each of you soon.

On behalf of the Conservation Committee of WYTU, congratulations and thank you for your hard work on this vitally important matter! To paraphrase my grandfather, "We done good."

Sincerely,

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