



2019 UPPER COLUMBIA CONSERVATION COMMISSION (UC³)
ANNUAL REPORT

UPPER COLUMBIA CONSERVATION COMMISSION



PARTNERS IN MANAGING AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES

UPPER COLUMBIA CONSERVATION COMMISSION

LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

In 2019, Montana's aquatic invasive species (AIS) programs continued to improve and expand. We have one of the strongest programs in the world due to the tireless work of Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) AIS Bureau Chief, Tom Woolf, and his team; the support of the Montana legislature; and the many passionate partners committed to continually advancing the program. The Upper Columbia Conservation Commission (UC³) took many steps in the past year to increase awareness and coordination among partners to better protect Montana's waterbodies from the threat of AIS. The bulk of this work focused on augmenting FWP's statewide AIS programming in the Upper Columbia Basin. Our work included designing and implementing an extensive outreach project focused on boating, angling and outdoor industry partners; augmenting FWP's TV, social media, radio and print ads regarding new AIS rules in the basin; participating in many local, state, regional and international AIS organization activities; and awarding an AIS monitoring contract to expand citizen science efforts throughout the Upper Columbia. We also had the opportunity to work with legislators in the last session to expand the membership of the UC³, ensuring that voting members are as diverse as the majestic and ecologically abundant Upper Columbia sub-basins they represent, and providing opportunities to collaborate in mitigating the risks posed by harmful AIS such as zebra and quagga mussels. We look forward to another year busy with AIS prevention projects, coordination and relationship building with new and existing partners. This annual report summarizes our work, partners and funding in the fiscal year of 2019 (July 1 – June 30).

Lori Curtis, Chair

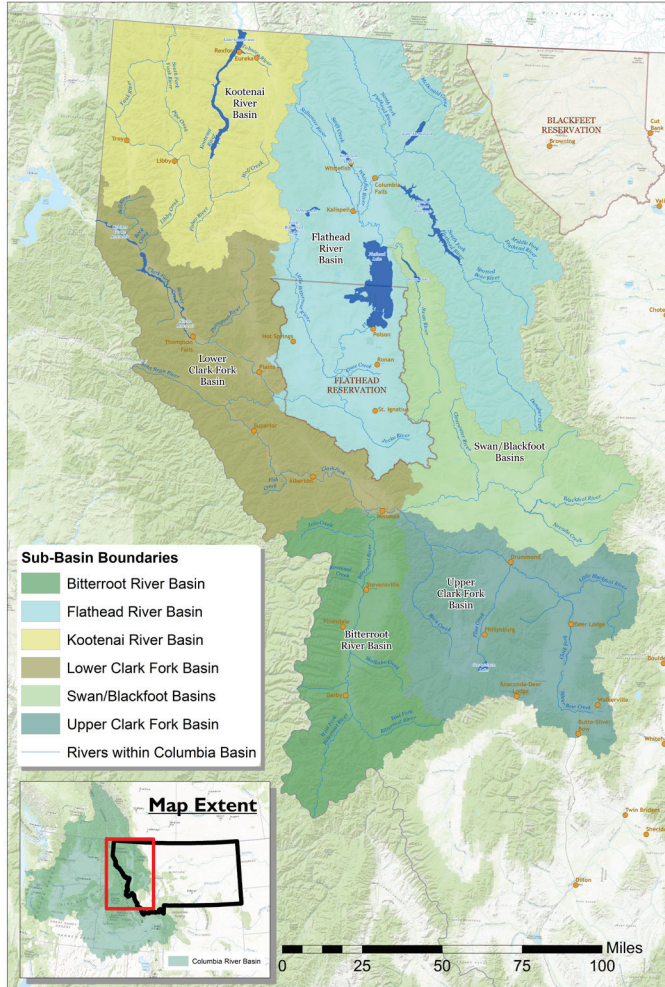


MISSION/BACKGROUND

The mission of the UC³ is to protect the aquatic environment in Montana tributaries to the Columbia River from the threat of AIS in order to protect water resources, downstream interests, and the economic and ecological vitality of the region.

The UC³ was created in the 2017 legislative session by House Bill 622. This commission was established to foster close cooperation and coordination between international, federal, regional, state, tribal, and local water resource managers to develop and implement comprehensive Upper Columbia River Basin prevention and management measures to prevent the introduction and/or further establishment of AIS.

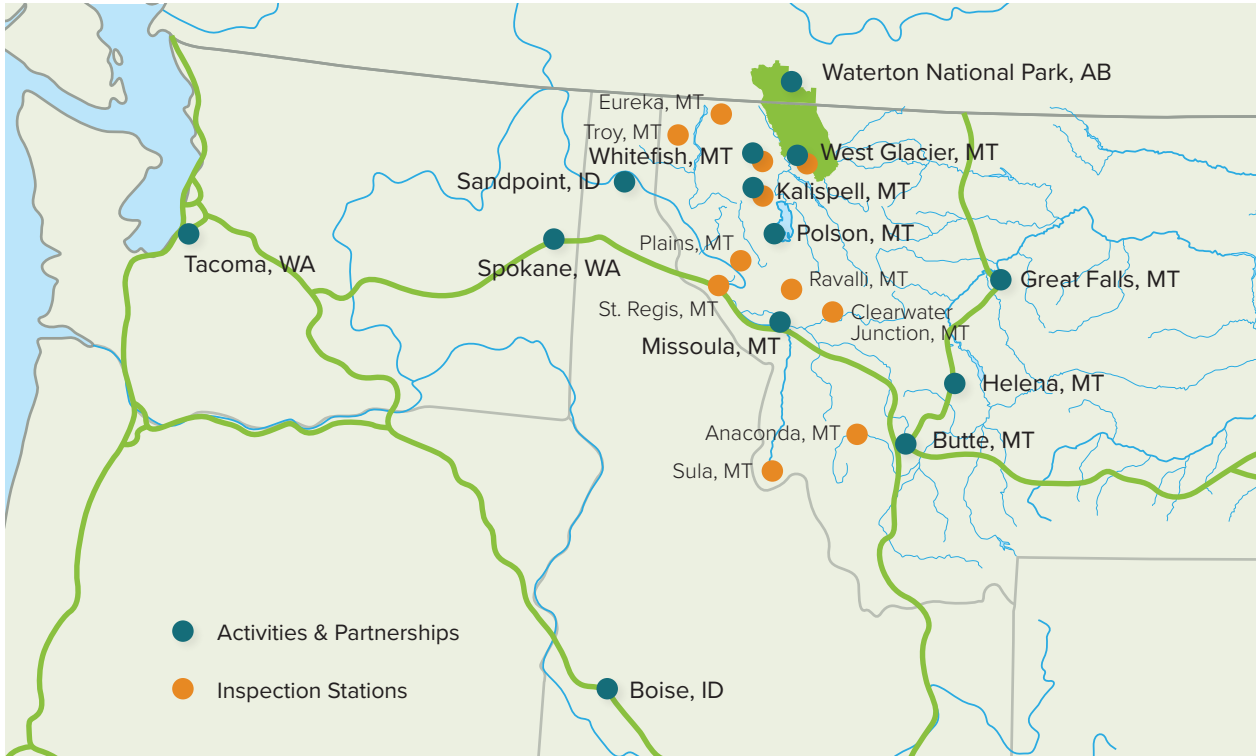
Columbia River Basin in Montana



2019 ACTIVITIES & PARTNERSHIPS*

- Spokane, WA: Pacific Northwest Economic Region Invasive Species Session (July 24 – 25)
- Butte, MT: Council of State Governments West River Governance Meeting (Aug. 21)
- Waterton National Park, AB: Crown Managers Partnership Meeting (Sept. 6 – 7)
- Kalispell, MT: Flathead Lake Mussel Response Exercise (Sept. 11 – 14)
- Helena, MT: Environmental Quality Council Meeting (Sept. 12 – 13)
- **West Glacier, MT: UC³ Fall Meeting (Sept. 26)**
- Helena, MT: Montana Invasive Species Council Meeting (Oct. 3)
- Whitefish, MT: Water Symposium (Oct. 10 – 12)
- Tacoma, WA: Western Regional Panel on Aquatic Nuisance Species (Oct. 24 – 26)
- Sandpoint, ID: Pend Oreille Basin Commission (Nov. 2)
- Helena, MT: Western Governors' Association & Montana Invasive Species Council Summit (Nov. 14 – 16)
- Boise, ID: Columbia River Basin/100th Meridian (Dec. 3 – 5)
- **Missoula, MT: UC³ Winter Meeting (Dec. 12)**
- Helena, MT: AIS Information Session for Legislature (Jan. 15)
- Helena, MT: Montana Watershed Coordination Council Annual Meeting (Jan. 28 – 29)
- **Kalispell, MT: FWP/UC³ Monitoring Workshop and UC³ Spring Meeting (Jan. 19 – 20)**
- **Helena, MT: Co-hosted AIS Training for BSWC Members with FWP (March 5 – 6)**
- Whitefish, MT: Montana Lakes Conference (March 13 – 15)
- Great Falls, MT: Montana Invasive Species Council Meeting & Tabletop Exercise (April 10 – 11)
- **Polson, MT: UC³ Summer Meeting (May 15)**
- Spokane, WA: Columbia River Basin/100th Meridian (June 4 – 5)
- Sandpoint, ID: Lakes Commission (June 19)
- **Kalispell, MT: Co-hosted AIS Training for Natural Resource Educators With FWP (June 21)**
- Butte, MT: AIS Training for Natural Resource Educators With FWP (June 27)
- Locations of Inspection Stations Within the Basin:
 - Ravalli, MT: CSKT Contracted Watercraft Inspection Station (March – Oct.)
 - Clearwater Junction, MT: Missoula County Weed District Contracted Watercraft Inspection Station (May – Oct.)
 - Kalispell, MT: FWP Watercraft Inspection Station (May – Oct.)
 - Plains, MT: FWP Watercraft Inspection Station (May – Oct.)
 - St. Regis, MT: FWP Watercraft Inspection Station (May – Oct.)
 - Anaconda, MT: FWP Watercraft Inspection Station (May – Oct.)
 - Sula, MT: FWP Watercraft Inspection Station (May – Oct.)
 - Troy, MT: FWP Watercraft Inspection Station (May – Oct.)
 - Eureka, MT: FWP Watercraft Inspection Station (May – Oct.)
 - Whitefish, MT: Whitefish Watercraft Inspection Stations (May – Oct.)
 - West Glacier, MT: Glacier National Park Inspection Station

*UC³ led/co-hosted highlighted in blue.



MEMBERSHIP

APPOINTED MEMBERS

CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

Lori Curtis, Chair
*Science & Education Director,
Whitefish Lake Institute
Vice Chair, Flathead Conservation District*

MONTANA INVASIVE SPECIES COUNCIL

Tom Woolf, Vice Chair
*AIS Bureau Chief, Montana Department
of Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Co-Vice Chair, Montana Invasive
Species Council*

CONFEDERATED SALISH & KOOTENAI TRIBES

Dennis Clairmont
Tribal Council Member

HYDROPOWER

Paul Kusnierz
*Fisheries Biologist
Avista*

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS

SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE NOMINEES

Representative Dave Fern (HD5)
Representative Neil Duram (HD2)

PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE NOMINEES

Senator Mike Cuffe (SD1)
Senator Janet Ellis (SD41)

STAFF

Kate Wilson
Commission Administrator

ELECTRIC CO-OPS

Stacey Schnebel
*Flathead Electric Coop
Electric Coops Association of Montana*

PRIVATE INDUSTRY

Chris Parrot
*Owner
Jesco Marine*

PRIVATE LANDOWNER

Phil Matson
*Research Technician
Flathead Lake Biological Station*

MEMBER-AT-LARGE

Mike Koopal
*Executive Director
Whitefish Lake Institute*

FLATHEAD RIVER BASIN

Brian 'BJ' Johnson
*Owner
Sea Me Paddle Kayak Tours*

UPPER/MIDDLE CLARK FORK RIVER BASINS

Andrew Gordor
*Legal Director
Clark Fork Coalition*

BITTERROOT RIVER BASIN

Jeremy Anderson
*President
Trout Unlimited Bitterroot Chapter*

SWAN/BLACKFOOT RIVER BASINS

Rob Rich (*Swan River Basin*)
*Conservation and Education Associate
Swan Valley Connections*

KOOTENAI RIVER BASIN

Paul Bradford
Libby Rod & Gun Club

LOWER CLARK FORK RIVER BASIN

Larry Lack
*Chair
Sanders County Aquatic Plant Task Force*

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS/AGENCY MEMBERS

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Chris Downs
*Fisheries Program Manager
Glacier National Park*

U.S. FOREST SERVICE

Michelle Cox
Invasive Species Coordinator, Region 1

U.S. BUREAU OF RECLAMATION

Heidi McMaster
*Hazmat, Invasive Species and IPM Coordinator
Pacific Northwest Office*

NORTHWEST POWER & CONSERVATION COUNCIL

Jennifer Anders
Montana Representative & Chair

USDA NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

Monica Pokorny
Plant Materials Specialist

U.S. FISH & WILDLIFE SERVICE

Joanne Grady
Aquatic Invasive Species Coordinator, Region 6

COMMITTEES

EDUCATION & OUTREACH

CHAIR: Lori Curtis

Education and outreach planning and coordination, AIS training for educators

WATERCRAFT INSPECTIONS

CHAIR: Tom Woolf

All watercraft inspection stations statewide and in Alberta and British Columbia contribute to this committee. Developed extensive maps and lists that include FWP stations, partner and border stations, a Call Tree Annual AIS Summit

EARLY DETECTION & MONITORING

CHAIR: Chris Downs

Sample data (eDNA and microscopy) spatially represented on GIS maps including data gaps and reducing sampling redundancy. Annual Upper Columbia River Basin Aquatic Invasive Species Early Detection and Monitoring Plan incorporating early detection sampling information, sample type and equipment decontamination protocols.

RESPONSE & PREPAREDNESS

CHAIR: Erik Hanson

Participate with Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks on the Montana Dreissenid Mussel Rapid Response Plan and response efforts.

FOUR INGREDIENTS FOR A SUCCESSFUL COMMISSION:

1

GREAT LEADERSHIP:

We have strong leadership in our executive committee, dedicated commission members, and excellent staff support.

2

APPROPRIATE TOOLS:

We have access to technology and communications tools that allow us to work efficiently and effectively.

3

A TRUSTED REPUTATION:

We have worked hard to be civic minded, share our knowledge widely, and acknowledge and engage all entities addressing AIS.

4

DEDICATED PARTNERS:

The list of organizations working with UC³ is long and diverse including academia, researchers, scientists, agencies, policymakers, and community stakeholders. We continue to engage existing partners and encourage new partnerships to share in our efforts to combat AIS in the Montana portion of the Upper Columbia Basin.

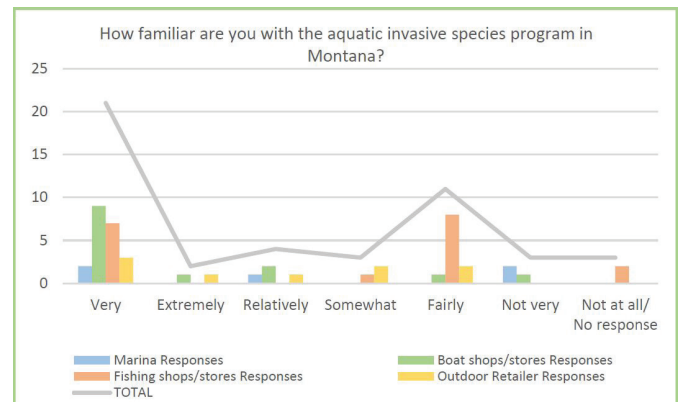
SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATIONS & SPECIAL PROJECTS

UC³ INDUSTRY PARTNER OUTREACH PROJECT

In the 2019 season, the UC³—utilizing a Big Sky Watershed Corps (BSWC) member—conducted a project to provide targeted outreach to industry partners from marinas, boat shops, angling/fly shops and outdoor retailers. We conducted an inventory of all water recreation-related businesses in the Upper Columbia Basin. The UC³ and BSWC member worked closely with FWP to ensure the Clean. Drain. Dry. campaign and AIS program messaging were consistently communicated and shared goals were encompassed in the project.

We visited a total of 61 businesses in the basin during the 2019 season. We met with business owners/managers with industry specific messaging and AIS program updates to enable them to better educate their customers and clients.

Most of the businesses surveyed indicated that they had a “fairly good” to “very good” level of knowledge about the AIS program in Montana. They also thought that most boaters, tourists and members in the community were ‘aware’ or ‘sort of aware’ of AIS risks. Most of those surveyed had previously been through an inspection station, either in Montana or elsewhere. Nearly all of those surveyed indicated that they would be interested in AIS training should it be made available for industry partners. While we reached many water recreation-based businesses in the 2019 season, there remain several businesses to be contacted. The UC³ has therefore partnered with Missoula County Weed District to secure another BSWC member to continue the project in the 2020 season.



Industry Partner Familiarity with AIS

UC³ AUGMENTATION OF FWP AIS OUTREACH EFFORTS

The UC³ contributed funds to augment FWP's outreach efforts in the basin, which included television and radio advertisements, as well as print media and social media ads targeting boaters and anglers residing in or coming to the basin for water-based recreation opportunities. In close collaboration with FWP, the UC³ employed public service announcements in key areas during the early recreational spring months of May and June.

Messaging highlighted the importance of personal responsibility (Clean. Drain. Dry. campaign tenets), mandatory inspections, and the new rules in Montana that are not consistent throughout the basin (e.g., inspection before launch if coming from out of state, crossing the Continental Divide, or entering the Flathead Basin). In addition to these efforts, our BSWC member supported FWP and UC³ staff by hosting AIS information booths at several events and activities throughout the Upper Columbia Basin.

ANGLERS: CLEAN YOUR GEAR. STOP AIS.

When anglers travel to fish at different lakes and streams, they can unintentionally transport aquatic invasive species (AIS). Montana's biggest threats are boaters and anglers using Montana's waters after fishing in another state or province. Some AIS are so tiny—such as fish diseases, parasites and invasive mussel larvae—you can only see them under a microscope.

Take these simple steps every time you fish to be sure you're not moving invasive species from one waterbody to another.

CLEAN

all plants, mud and debris from fishing gear, waders and boots before leaving the water. Use a scrub brush if needed.

DRAIN

any standing water from gear. A sponge can help.

DRY

everything before using it again. Gear should be dry to the touch. When possible use different waders for different waterbodies.

DISPOSE

of unwanted bait in the trash, not on land or in the water.

NEVER

transport plants, fish or animals into a different body of water.



In addition to the steps above, anglers should:

- Use non-felt soled boots to further reduce the risk of spreading AIS.
- Completely dry waders before moving to a different waterbody.
- Always stop at inspection stations if transporting watercraft—including rafts, belly and drift boats.



CLEAN. DRAIN. DRY.

CleanDrainDryMT.com

PARTNER SUCCESS STORIES

Often, the only time we hear about the AIS program is when something “bad” occurs such as a positive AIS detection in a waterbody or a fouled boat at an inspection station. We don’t hear about the over 110,000 inspections conducted around the state or about the people who stand on the front lines doing the work. The state of Montana collaborates with tribes, conservation districts, and other local partners to implement a comprehensive statewide watercraft inspection program. This year, FWP and the UC³ reached out to gather some of the positive AIS stories and the people who make them happen. Here is a sampling of what we learned:

GARFIELD COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT – THE FIRST!

In 2018, the Garfield County Conservation District (GCCD) became the first conservation district (CD) in Montana to operate an inspection station. Under GCCD Administrator Dusty Olsen’s direction, the inspection station at Flowing Wells opened, providing protection to much of central Montana. In 2019, Dusty, with support from her CD board, also took on running the Wibaux Inspection Station. Dusty also provided support and information to additional conservation districts to help them operate inspection stations in 2019. There have been many successes—being able to open a new station, expand inspection station hours, and provide support to additional stations. Perhaps the biggest success has been to provide a model for conservation district operation of inspection stations.

CONSERVATION DISTRICTS TO THE FRONT LINES

In 2019 Montana’s watercraft inspection program was greatly enhanced through the extraordinary efforts of CDs taking over inspection station management in Big Horn, Broadus, Flowing Wells, Garfield, Nashua McCone, Powder River, and St. Xavier. These CDs had the local knowledge to tap into the local workforce, expand operating hours, and open new stations in order to strengthen and fill gaps in Montana’s perimeter defense strategy.

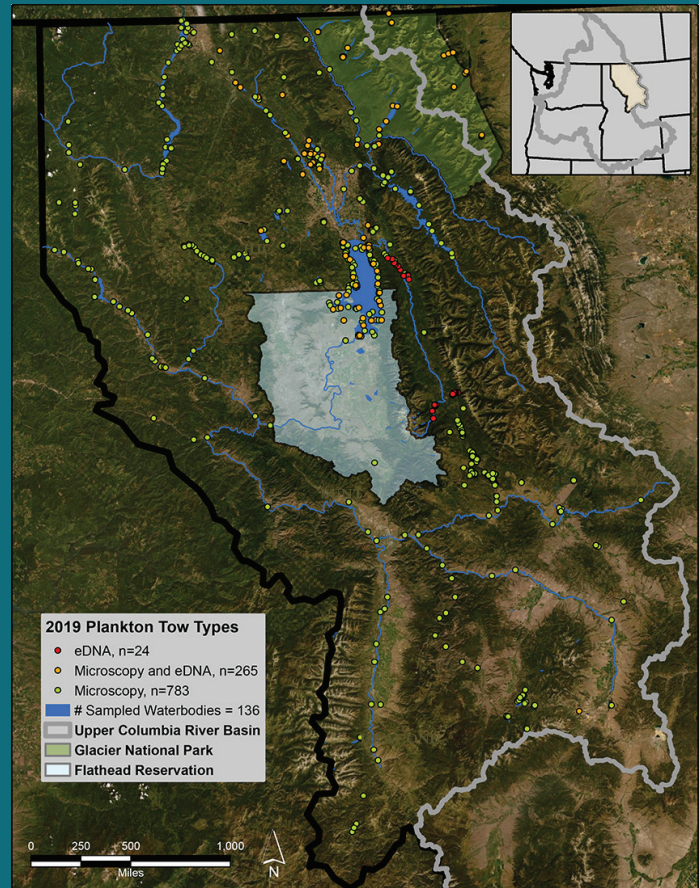
ALL 50+ CITIZEN SCIENTIST VOLUNTEERS OF THE CLEARWATER CHAIN-OF-LAKES IN MISSOULA COUNTY

AIS monitoring, outreach and prevention activities began 10 years ago in the Clearwater Chain-of-Lakes near Seeley Lake after a local citizen who had learned of the threat of the zebra/quagga mussels spoke at multiple local homeowners associations’ annual meetings. Each meeting brought new volunteer homeowners to deploy artificial substrate traps off their docks. By the end of the summer of 2010, 17 volunteers were participating in the effort. That was only the beginning. The program was adopted by the Clearwater Resource Council and expanded to include plankton tow net sampling using equipment and materials provided by FWP. With DNRC grant funds in 2014, the full monitoring program was launched on the six highest-risk lakes in the Clearwater Chain-of-Lakes: Alva, Inez, Seeley, Salmon, Placid, and Big Sky. This Citizen Science program continues to this day with sampling dependent on funding levels. These individuals have selflessly donated countless time, talents and equipment to the effort to keep the Clearwater Chain-of-Lakes free from AIS.

OUR LAKE OUR FUTURE: WHITEFISH LAKE AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

Initiated in 2012 by the Whitefish Lake Institute (WLI), the Whitefish AIS program focuses on early detection monitoring and watercraft inspections. In 2017, the program ramped up watercraft inspections in response to concerns at Tiber and Canyon Ferry reservoirs. Whereas WLI recommends program tasks each year to the Whitefish City Council, city staff is responsible for implementation at the two inspection stations on Whitefish Lake and the AIS Prevention/Decontamination Station.

The responsibility of the program's effectiveness falls upon the shoulders of City of Whitefish Community Services Coordinator Carla Belski, who has become a powerful leader at the local level. A thoughtful, hands-on manager, she listens to and values her employees, and, as a result of their combined recommendations, Carla has fine-tuned a local program that is now a statewide model. Carla's positive attitude, organization, and attention to detail moved a plan that existed on paper to actionable results. Her efforts exemplify the best of what can be expected of an individual thrust into a leadership position on a very challenging issue. She has embraced her role and become a true leader in the AIS community.



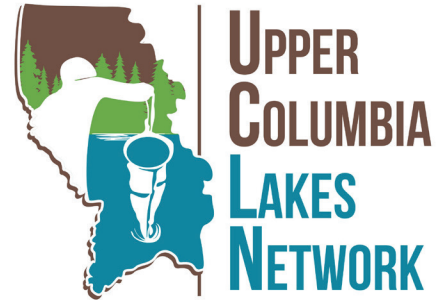
Upper Columbia Basin AIS Monitoring Efforts (2019).
Map developed by Phil Matson, Flathead Lake Biological Station

2019 AIS MONITORING EFFORTS IN THE UPPER COLUMBIA BASIN

In 2019, extensive AIS monitoring efforts in the state of Montana garnered over 2,100 water samples. FWP, Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes, Flathead Lake Biological Station, Whitefish Lake Institute, Clearwater Resource Council and many other partners have been monitoring in the Upper Columbia Basin for years. They follow FWP protocols and report efforts through a new data application developed for AIS monitoring data collection. In the Upper Columbia Basin, there were a total of 136 waterbodies sampled, with 783 samples analyzed via microscopy, 24 samples analyzed using environmental DNA (eDNA) and 265 analyzed using both methods.

UPPER COLUMBIA LAKES NETWORK (UCLN)

The goal of the UCLN is to extend the training and deployment of watershed group citizen scientists to collect aquatic resource information using standardized AIS sample collection and equipment decontamination protocols. This program will inform and complement the goals of the UC³ Early Detection & Monitoring Committee. The UC³ assisted with the development of the UCLN through a federal Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) grant. While the state, through FWP and its many partners, is active in AIS monitoring, most citizen scientists are conducting AIS monitoring within the Flathead Basin. The UC³ sought to expand this capacity throughout the Upper Columbia Basin. The Whitefish Lake Institute (WLI), with support from the Flathead Lake Biological Station (FLBS), was the successful bidder in the competitive Request For Proposal process. The contract also provides funding for the development of a UNLN website and assistance with the UC³'s annual monitoring plan.



Since finalization of the UC³ Monitoring Contract in June of 2019, the WLI began identifying gaps in geographical coverage of monitoring and long-term stewardship of basin lakes and reservoirs. Potential priority waterbodies were identified. WLI recognized that an important component to getting new groups up and running was to provide them with a comprehensive set of monitoring and decontamination equipment. WLI program staff researched and purchased key equipment necessary for new groups to begin monitoring their lakes. Equipment for 11 monitoring kits was purchased and packaged for distribution.

WLI and the Flathead Lake Biological Station then partnered to plan the first of four workshops for new and existing monitoring partners in order to increase consistency in water quality monitoring and AIS early detection programs in the region. An invitation and training flyer were sent to 27 potentially interested stakeholders, watershed groups, government agencies, and individual citizen scientists.

WLI and the Flathead Lake Biological Station hosted training workshops in June at FLBS in Yellow Bay, Flathead Lake and in October at Georgetown Lake. The training included information related to water quality monitoring, aquatic invasive plant identification, the life history and threats associated with dreissenid mussels, and training on how to use FWP's Survey123 data collection app. The key components of successful survey monitoring were also discussed including plankton tow sampling techniques (horizontal, oblique, and vertical hauls), sample site selection criteria, equipment needs and specifications, sample preservation, ancillary data collection and equipment decontamination procedures. The training also provided hands-on, practical training of shoreline and boat site sampling protocols and procedures, as well as an equipment decontamination lesson. Roughly half a dozen participants attended, plus some FLBS interns. Groups attending included Kootenai River Network, University of Montana, Clark Fork and Kootenai River Basins Council, Swan Lakers, and Flathead Lakers.



June 2019 AIS Monitoring Training

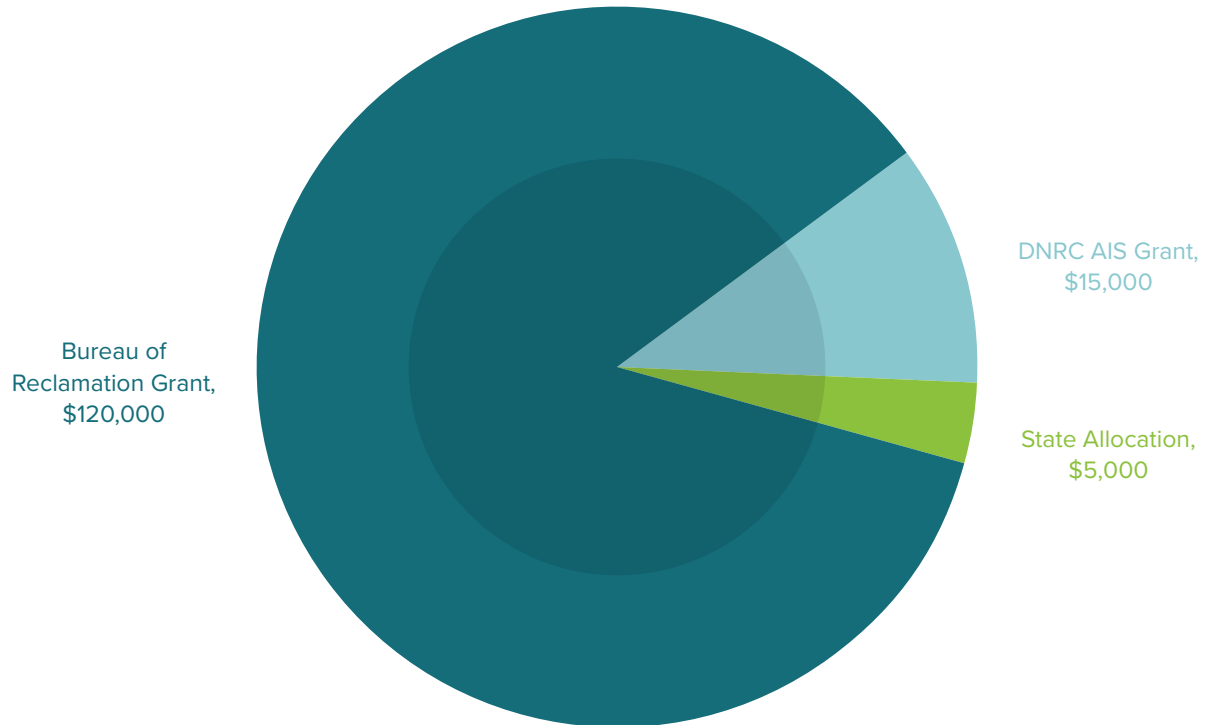
WLI has also partnered with the Flathead National Forest for increased eDNA monitoring on four lakes on national forest lands in 2020. Samples will be collected in 2020 at Hungry Horse Reservoir (10), Tally Lake and Ashley Lake (3 each), and Upper Stillwater Lake (2). The samples will be analyzed for zebra mussel, quagga mussel, Eurasian watermilfoil and curly leaf pondweed.

2020 outreach efforts will focus on identifying incubator groups around Lake Koochanusa, Noxon Reservoir, the Yaak Valley including Bull Lake, McGregor Lake, Georgetown Lake and the Bitterroot Valley. Depending on plankton net availability after contact with possible incubator groups, it could also focus on enabling existing lake groups on Ashley Lake, Echo Lake, Little Bitterroot Lake, Lindbergh Lake, and Lake Mary Ronan to conduct additional sampling.

FINANCIALS & FUNDING DISCUSSION

The Upper Columbia Conservation Commission was initially allocated \$10,000 for the biennium (2018 – 2019) or \$5,000 for each fiscal year. This funding was used exclusively for commission-member travel reimbursements, meetings and supplies. The UC³ was also the successful recipient of a \$15,000 DNRC AIS grant in 2018, which was expended in FY19 on the development of an informational website and educational materials. In late 2019 the UC³ was awarded a federal Bureau of Reclamation grant that included funding for three projects in the Upper Columbia Basin: 1) augmenting AIS education and outreach; 2) expanding AIS citizen science monitoring efforts; and 3) conducting an industry outreach project with marinas, boat shops and angling shops. A breakdown of these funding sources and expenditures appears below.

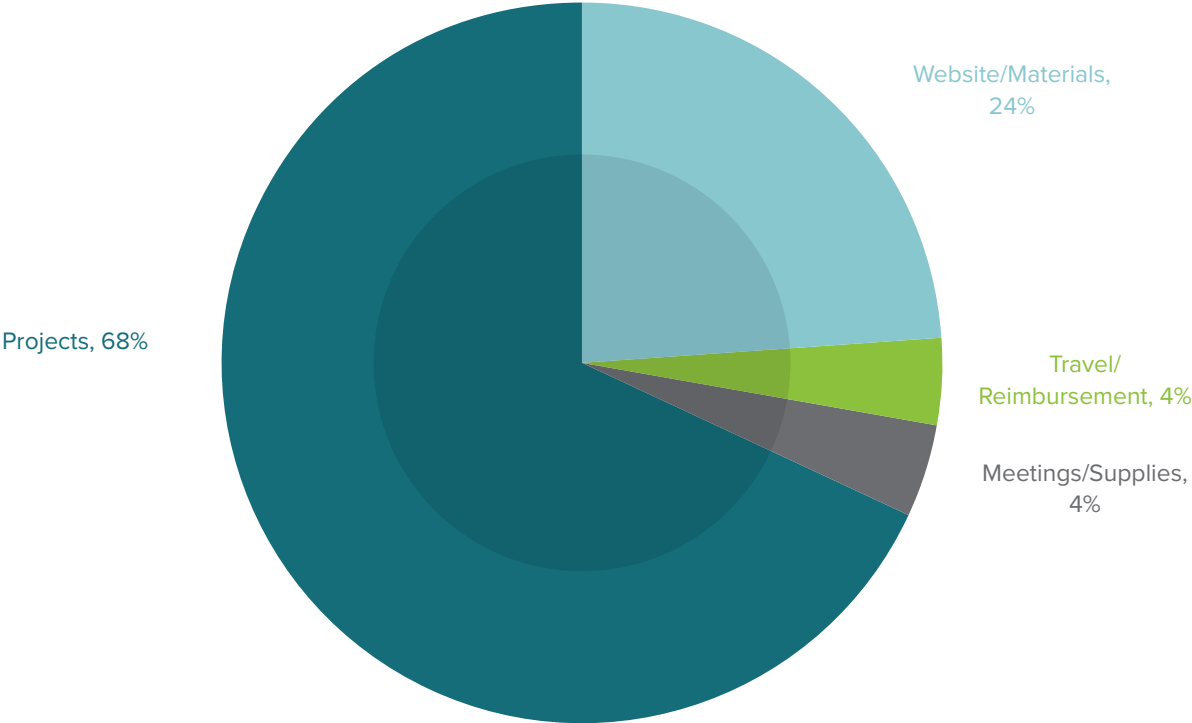
FUNDING SOURCES FY19



*Bureau of Reclamation Grant active 2019 – 2022 (not limited to FY19)

*Total funding FY19 = \$140,000

TOTAL EXPENDITURES FY19



*Total Expenditures FY2019: \$60,296



UPPER COLUMBIA CONSERVATION COMMISSION



PARTNERS IN MANAGING AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES