



Aquatic Nuisance Species Program

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Aquatic nuisance species (ANS) are invasive animals, plants, and disease-causing pathogens that can affect lakes, reservoirs, rivers, streams, and wetlands. This *issue brief* provides an explanation of ANS and an overview of the [Colorado ANS Program](#).

Aquatic Nuisance Species

ANS are introduced accidentally or intentionally outside of their native habitat range. Because they have no natural competitors or predators, they can reproduce rapidly and out-compete the native species. Once introduced into a habitat, most nuisance species are difficult to eradicate, and the cost of managing nuisance species is often high.

Zebra and quagga mussels are two ANS that pose a significant threat to aquatic wildlife and water quality in Colorado. Due to their hard shell and ability to rapidly reproduce, these species are capable of impairing the operation of dams, water treatment facilities, and power plants. Examples of other ANS that pose a threat to Colorado's waterways are the Eurasian watermilfoil, New Zealand mudsnails, and rusty crayfish.

Colorado Aquatic Nuisance Species Program

Overview

In 2008, the General Assembly enacted legislation setting up the parameters for the ANS Program.¹ The goal of the ANS Program is to protect Colorado's natural resources, outdoor recreation, and water supply systems by preventing new introductions and reducing the spread of costly ANS, such as zebra or quagga mussels, in the state. Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) provides ANS support to all state waters, regardless of jurisdiction.

Colorado law defines ANS as exotic or nonnative aquatic wildlife or any plant species that have been determined to pose a significant threat to the aquatic resources or water infrastructure of the state. It is illegal to possess, import, export, ship, transport, release, plant, place, or cause an ANS to be released into a body of water in Colorado. CPW is tasked with monitoring, preventing, and eradicating ANS from Colorado's waterways. State law requires an [annual report](#) on the state's efforts in addressing ANS. State rules set the standard for watercraft inspections, decontaminations,

¹ Section 33-10.5-101, *et seq.*, C.R.S.

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impoundments, sampling, monitoring, identification, and reporting for the ANS Program.²

In 2024, through the ANS Program, CPW and its partners inspected approximately 463,000 watercraft, decontaminated more than 32,000 watercraft, intercepted 110 mussel-fouled watercraft, and sampled over 250 state waters.³

Inspection and Decontamination

Qualified peace officers and authorized CPW agents inspect and, if necessary, decontaminate or quarantine watercrafts that carry ANS. Standardized watercraft inspection and decontamination protocols are utilized at inspection stations throughout the state to allow for boaters to comply with inspection requirements. CPW coordinates protocols, provides trainings, and conducts public education to prevent the spread of ANS in Colorado.

Sampling and Monitoring

CPW staff monitors the state's public waters for numerous ANS, although the focus of sampling is on early detection of zebra and quagga mussels. The state uses visual analysis, DNA verification, and DNA confirmation to

identify, verify, and confirm identification of zebra or quagga larvae.

In 2024, CPW hired an early detection and rapid response specialist to oversee the sampling and monitoring program. The specialist is responsible for managing the sampling teams and the ANS laboratory, as well as coordinating and responding to any ANS detections requiring rapid response.

Funding

Funding for the ANS Program comes from the Aquatic Nuisance Species Fund. The fund consists of moneys from the Severance Tax Operational Fund, fines collected for ANS law violations, and revenue from ANS stamps under the Mussel-free Colorado Act.⁴

The Mussel-free Colorado Act requires the purchase of an ANS stamp from the CPW to operate or use a motorboat or sailboat on Colorado waters. The fees for the stamp, which CPW may adjust by rule, are as follows:

- \$25 for a registered motorboat or sailboat, or one exempted from registration in Colorado operated by a Colorado resident; or
- \$50 for a motorboat or sailboat exempted from registration in Colorado not operated by a Colorado resident.

² [2 CCR 405-8](#).

³ [SMART Act Presentation, Colorado Department of Natural Resources, 2025](#).

⁴ Section 33-10.5-104.5, C.R.S.