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**Heller Testifies at Senate EPW Committee Over Quagga Mussels Legislation**

**(Washington, D.C.)** – Today, U.S. Senator Dean Heller (R-NV) testified at the U.S. Senate Environment and Public Works Water and Wildlife Subcommittee’s legislative hearing about S. 2530, the Protecting Lakes Against Quaggas Act. Introduced by Senator Heller, this legislation provides a nationwide solution to the quagga mussel infiltration affecting Nevada’s lakes and waterways.

**Remarks as prepared:**

Chairman Cardin, Ranking Member Boozman, and members of the Subcommittee: thank you for holding this hearing and for inviting me to testify on *S.2530, the Protecting Lakes Against Quaggas Act*.  I appreciate this opportunity to discuss Nevada’s quagga mussel efforts, and my bill, which can be an important part of a nationwide solution.

Quagga mussels are freshwater mollusks with razor sharp shells.  Each mussel is usually no bigger than a man's thumbnail, but they wreak havoc on the water bodies they infiltrate by multiplying at an alarming rate, clogging water pipelines, power plant cooling systems and marine equipment, and damaging boats, water infrastructure, and native wildlife.

They were first introduced into the Great Lakes in mid-80s, and have since spread via boat to Lake Mead, a heavily recreated reservoir on the Nevada/Arizona border that also provides over 90 percent of Southern Nevada’s water supply.  Until January 2007, when they first turned up at Lake Mead, quaggas had never been found west of the Mississippi River. Since then, they have been detected at Lahontan Reservoir, Rye Patch Reservoir, Lake Tahoe and many other western lakes and reservoirs.

The only way for these mussels to spread from lake to lake is by hitchhiking on recreational boats.  Preventing their spread sounds easy – all it takes are boat inspections to make sure they are not attached to boat hulls or hidden in the bilge water – but that work is difficult and expensive.  Quagga and zebra mussels have cost more in prevention and control than any other aquatic species to invade the United States, costing an estimated $5 billion in prevention and control efforts since 1987. The Bureau of Reclamation alone spends $1 million annually on quagga mussel control at Hoover Dam.

A lot of great work is currently being done on the ground to prevent the spread of quaggas, but the problem is not going away.  Just last week, Lake Tahoe watercraft inspectors intercepted a boat with quagga mussels and an unidentified snail species hiding in the anchor locker. The boat, coming from Lake Mead, was inspected at the Spooner Summit inspection station on Highway 50 in Nevada, fully decontaminated, and ultimately cleared to launch in Lake Tahoe.

Since the start of the summer boating season in May 2014, inspectors have intercepted 24 boats containing invasive species bound for the waters of Lake Tahoe. Eight of these boats contained invasive mussels and another four boats were carrying several different snail species.

Over the Fourth of July holiday, more than 725 boats were screened for invasive species at four inspection stations surrounding Lake Tahoe—a 17 percent increase from 2013.

*The Protecting Lakes Against Quaggas Act* is a straightforward common-sense proposal that will assist ongoing efforts to stop the spread of this destructive invasive species.  It adds the quagga mussel to the national list of invasive species covered under the Lacy Act.  Currently, the Zebra Mussel is listed, but quagga is not. A listing will allow for increased inspections of boats crossing state lines or entering federal lands to further prevent “quagga hitchhiking.”

My bill garnered support from diverse range of stakeholders including but not limited to the Western Governors Association, the Colorado River Energy Distributors Association, Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, National Parks Conservation Association, and the National Wildlife Federation. Additionally, my friend and fellow Nevadan, Dr. Joe Heck, introduced similar legislation last year in the House that has garnered twenty-two Republican and Democrat cosponsors across the political spectrum, many from affected states.

Before I conclude, I would like to thank Nevada Department of Wildlife Director Tony Wasley for being here today.  Tony is a qualified leader with a distinguished 17-year NDOW career.  He was appointed by Governor Brian Sandoval last April, and since then has done a tremendous job leading our state’s efforts eliminate aquatic invasive species as well as managing Nevada’s statewide game and conservation projects for species such as the sage-grouse, mule deer, elk, and bighorn sheep.

Nevada is fortunate to have Tony’s leadership at NDOW, and I greatly appreciate him coming out to DC to testify in support of my bill.  He knows first-hand that providing our local authorities more tools to prevent quagga’s travel will help stop the spread of these pests and could potentially save billions of dollars in future maintenance costs.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify in front of your subcommittee today on this important Nevada priority.  I look forward to working with you and our many supporters to advance the PLAQ Act here in the Senate.

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