BILL: AB 2443 (Williams)

SUBJECT: VESSEL REGISTRATION FEE FOR AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES-RELATED PROGRAMS

RECOMMENDATION: Support

Recommendation: AB 2443 would impose an annual quagga and zebra mussel infestation prevention fee in an amount not to exceed $10 on every aquatic vessel subject to vessel registration fees. The revenue from the fee would fund grants to local agencies for the implementation of dreissenid mussel infestation prevention plans. Since 2008, the County of Santa Clara has worked in cooperation with the Santa Clara Valley Water District (SCVWD) to operate a vessel inspection program on County reservoirs to prevent the introduction of quagga and zebra mussels in the waterways. While the County’s existing Legislative Policies express support for federal and state dollars to help combat the spread of quagga mussels, they do not speak to the imposition of a local fee. AB 2443 would provide an additional means to fund the program, and staff recommends support.

Background and Analysis: Zebra and quagga mussels are invasive aquatic pests that have been introduced to portions of California. Recreational boating has been identified as a source of introduction, and once introduced to a waterway, significant economic damage occurs because these pests reproduce prolifically clogging filters, pipes, pumps and critical infrastructure of agricultural, municipal and industrial water delivery systems. A mussel infestation corrupting the Bay Area and Sacramento Delta water channels would likely result in agricultural production losses and produce significant impacts to the environment and losses in local revenues from recreational boating.

In 2008, zebra mussels were discovered in San Justo Reservoir in San Benito County. The discovery escalated the risk of mussel infestations in all reservoirs in the County’s Parks system. In response, the County and SCVWD jointly developed and implemented a pilot vessel inspection program on County reservoirs to prevent the introduction of quagga and zebra mussels. The program’s annual costs of $750,000 are shared between the two agencies. Program components include public education and outreach, physical vessel inspections and active management of recreational, boating and fishing activities. The Parks Department currently collects a $7 fee per inspection with the option to purchase a $35 annual inspection fee to help offset the cost of the vessel inspection program. In Fiscal Year 2011, the revenues from these fees totaled $61,500.
Generally, every sail-powered vessel over eight feet in length and every motor-driven vessel (regardless of length) that is used on waters in California are subject to registration by the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV). AB 2443 would impose an annual quagga and zebra mussel infestation prevention fee in an amount not to exceed $10 on every vessel subject to a registration fee. The Department of Boating and Waterways is directed to establish the fee in consultation with a technical advisory group made up of interested persons, including recreational boating and reservoir operation representatives. The fee revenue would be deposited into the Quagga and Zebra Mussel Infestation Prevention Account, which would fund grants to local agencies for the implementation of dreissenid mussel prevention plans.

AB 2443 would help fund mussel monitoring, inspection, and eradication programs throughout the state by authorizing a fee on registered vessels. Since the bill provides a funding mechanism for these efforts and would help the County's current efforts, staff recommends support.