

Minutes of the Casitas Municipal Water District
Special Board Meeting Held
January 9, 2008

A special meeting of the Board of Directors was held January 9, 2008 at Casitas' Office, Oak View, California immediately following the regularly scheduled meeting. Directors Word, Hicks, Handley, and Kaiser were present. Director Baggerly was absent. Also present were Steve Wickstrum, General Manager, Rebekah Vieira, Clerk of the Board, and Attorney, John Mathews. There were five staff members and 78 members of the public in attendance. President Word convened the meeting at 4:50 p.m.

1. Public Comments

None

2. Board Comments

None

3. Discussion and direction to staff regarding the Quagga mussel.

Director Kaiser commented that he found out about this meeting from a constituent early yesterday morning and received the agenda early yesterday afternoon, it is legally an adequate notice but he is concerned about it happening so quickly and the public's ability to become aware of the meeting. President Word said that is entirely true and accurate, it was quick, and this is an informational item only. This will not be the only session we have about this. This is too critical an area. Future sessions will be publicized well in advance and we will notify those that want to be notified. The issue affects us all. He went on to explain that we need to find out what the Quagga mussel is and find out why we are discussing it. There are several visitors here to help us. We have talked to the government regulatory agencies, the Bureau of Reclamation, Department of Fish & Game and anyone that will listen to us. He asked for Mike Giusti from the Department of Fish & Game to explain what we are dealing with.

Mr. Giusti, staff environmental scientist for DFG out of the Winchester office at Diamond Valley Lake explained that Quagga mussels became an issue Jan 6, 2007 when they were discovered in Lake Mead. It is an invasive species, freshwater mussel from Caspian Sea area and was introduced in the Great Lakes in 1988 in ballast water from freighters. In a short time it spread through most of the southeast. Director Kaiser questioned that it did not hitch a ride? Mr. Giusti explained it would have died in the ocean; it is a fresh water species. These things are devastating to the infrastructure and to pipes. They reproduce at 400,000 per female, up to a million eggs a year. Density is 400,000 per sq meter. They rely on broadcast and release eggs and milk into the water. Larvae stage carried with the water to find less current to settle out. They spread quickly in lakes. These things can close a 4 – 6 inch pipe in a month. Your concern is

how it affects filtration plants and water delivery. It is a serious issue. Billions of dollars have been spent to eradicate it. You are not going to eradicate it unless you can dewater for 30 days and dry out completely. Met has implemented a chlorination system to apply chlorine to kill larvae stage and there are no adult mussels in first 20 miles of the aqueduct. This is a difficult issue. From your perspective it is three hours away. We have no occurrences of mussels being moved into a new lake not directly connected to the Colorado River aqueduct. The Department of Agriculture inspected almost 100,000 boats; 9,000 had water in them and just over a hundred were quarantined. Mussels can attach to vegetation hanging on trailers. Day use launch, we don't find adult mussels attached to those. Boats in marinas for extended times find adult mussels. Larval stage is transported in water. The boat has to be dry and clean five to seven days and they will not survive. If it is caught at food and ag stations they are pressure treating with hot water. Heat kills them 120 – 140 degrees. Really I understand why you called the meeting. If established in Sacramento Delta then you will have them. We thought that when they were first discovered we would have time to react. Most recent finding in December at Lake Miramar. Last summer getting counts over 1,000 per liter per water infested at Havasu. We are not seeing many mussels below Parker Dam.

Director Handley asked about action for interstate transport of boats. Mr. Giusti said we are in the process with Assembly Woman Strickland who asked for something similar. Hopefully we can implement a tracking system in the next couple of months to e-mail as boats come in write down CF number and get an excel spreadsheet of each Ag inspection and San Diego lakes and that could be cut and paste on spreadsheet and type in CF number of boat coming into your lake and know if it came from an infested water. Assembly Woman Strickland and Met made this request. We will get it done as quickly as we can. He went on to explain that eradication is not a word being used by DFG. If they are in a lake you will not get rid of them. Director Kaiser asked if there is any natural predation to take care of them. Mr. Giusti said some red ear fish and some diving ducks might eat some but we are talking about a creature that is very prolific. Many experts are looking at every option they possibly have. Our goal now is to not have them move anymore than where they are now.

Mr. Wickstrum asked what it would do to the lake environment and habitat. Mr. Giusti mentioned the website [100th meridian.org](http://100thmeridian.org) and a pro/con article about benefits and detriments. If you have a dirty lake, the mussels will filter it and have algae reproduction at greater depths, there will be taste and odor issues, copper sulfate, fisheries are worried about what happens it cuts the bottom of the food chain out.

President Word asked for clarification that infestation has only been by water movement. Mr. Giusti said as far as we can tell that is correct. President Word asked about water fowl and birds? Mr. Giusti said it is possible but if the bird flies to another lake, they are not close by if it is a four or five hour flight. There is evidence on the east coast where you had the infestation upstream that got the mussel transported by a boat. In Southern California there is no evidence

of it transporting on a boat that is on your lake today and to another lake on the same day. Public education is a big deal.

President Word asked about a boat being in Havasu this weekend and in Lake Casitas next weekend. Mr. Giusti explained they have to take time to wipe the boat down, five to seven days should be minimal and it should dry out in seven days. That is the extreme. If you are out there in the summer, once you leave and get to Barstow you have cooked them.

Director Handley asked about the effect on the bass fishery. Mr. Giusti explained it depends on the lake, it could be significant and affect productivity. We are concerned. We are waiting to see with Lake Skinner. Lower Otagy sees increased water clarity, more cover more bass. It can go either way.

Director Kaiser asked in theory could the Quagga be transported by personal float tubes or kayaks. Mr. Giusti answered yes. Hopefully, after use they will be sprayed down with bleach or a hot water rinse. We recommend straight chlorine bleach.

Dick Barnett asked if clams will coexist with the mussel. Mr. Giusti said the Quagga will out compete them and will prevent the clam from opening.

A member of the public asked about inside the engine. Mr. Giusti answered generally the temperature in the motor is high; you have to drain out the water from lower engine. Another public member asked about the no reports of transport of lake to lake from boats. Mr. Giusti answered in California that is the case. Other than the first introduction we have not seen that. Another public member asked how much the sanitizing stations cost. Self contained units would be up to \$300,000 and have to be staffed. The Department is trying to get a handle on that. Now we recommend using straight bleach. Director Hicks asked if there are any units near here. Mr. Giusti said there is one at Lake Mead. President Word thanked Mr. Giusti for the information.

Ron Cervenka, a police detective has been regional tournament director for Western Outdoor News. He is a private contractor tournament director. For the past ten years he had administered tournaments on Lake Casitas. He is also a professional tournament angler. I am well aware of the crisis we are facing. We work with CA DFG. They are the governing body that issues us our tournament permits allowing us to go to the lakes. Through DFG we as organizers are receiving new information about Quagga mussels and it is being renewed frequently. Tracking where it is going and it is not an issue at this point. It is a concern. We pass this information on to our anglers with regards to what they can and need to do. Hand out brochures from DFG. We inform and educate our anglers. I am also fortunate to write outdoor articles with WON and western bass.com. I pass along information as I get it. We are the best informed users of the lakes with regard to Quagga mussels. We are informing our anglers. It is not bass boats that are the significant threat. Primarily the concerns are boats that have been moored in waters. If there is attached vegetation on the

boat it will be a concern. If you have seen in the parking lot from final weigh in to award ceremony, the anglers are wiping their boats down. You are not going to find much cleaner boats than those at bass tournaments. We are concerned about this issue. When they leave they are comfortable they not transporting mussels, and are taking precautions and cleaning boats.

Because of bass tournaments we work through Rob Weinerth. He makes the schedule up and we have established a strong and professional relationship. All tournament organizations work with Rob. Because of his efforts and years of catch and release Casitas is one of the premier trophy bass lakes in the country. Rob has his finger on the pulse of what is going on. The staff at Lake Casitas is getting it. We are grateful of his efforts. Rob and his staff physically work with us as boats come into the facility. Clean and dry. He is informing his staff and we are telling our anglers. Rob will assist us as we come through the park with inspections and certification process. Many of the top 25 bass have come from this lake. It is a chance to catch the fish of a lifetime. On Friday Jan 25th staff scheduled to hold a trophy bass fishing contest, the heavyweight bass classic. It is limited to 50 boats. We get media coverage and publicity and feature live streaming video of weigh in to be seen on line. We are reaching a huge audience across the country. We feel obligated to share the concerns of the Quagga mussel with anybody and everybody. We as tournament organization will do everything possible to educate our anglers. When talk, rumor buzz one of the greatest bass fishing lakes in the country will be shut down to boats you have everybody's attention. These guys will not spread Quagga mussels; they will spread the word about Quagga mussels. They are the ones that will educate those recreational people that are uninformed. If and when the board takes a vote to close the lake to boating in addition to tournaments, there will be economical impact to surrounding areas. It would be devastating, gas stations, boat dealerships, tackle, convenience stores, livelihood based on this lake. When that time comes and with information from Mike and Dwayne Maxwell, please take into consideration making a decision based on information and facts as opposed to misinformation and hysteria.

Scott Sweet – VP CA Bass Federation and the person who created the Lake Casitas Fishing Advisory board. We meet about once a quarter via the phone. One of the reasons we have this board is to represent the community. Ron is a member of that board, tournament directors are members, local fishing people and some of the local concessionaires are part of the group. We talk about the issues associated with the Lake. We will bring back the issue of education of people that will be here. We are using the logo stop aquatic hitchhikers. We have made contact with various companies to get more stickers and are using the lake advisory board to get out to all affected by Lake Casitas. Bass Federation and Bass Pro Shops could help defray some of the cost. Tournament anglers and boating companies, tackle shops. Include recreational boaters, get stickers and brochures out so recreational boaters have information so they are educated. Push clean and dry tag. Make sure the boat is clean and dry to prevent passage of Quagga mussels. Lake Casitas fishing advisory board is talking about this.

Ralph Steele – 1579 Orchard Drive. I am concerned about keeping foreign invaders out of the lake. Speaking on behalf of boaters that have already purchased an annual permit for the lake, if boats have to be prohibited from coming into the lake then the board should adopt an ordinance that boats already in dry storage could be used if kept within the fenced boundary. Board should take action to designate additional dry storage areas to hold more boats for annual permit holders.

Chuck Montag – 1309 La Paz Drive in Ojai. I fished Lake Casitas the day it opened. I taught my kids, grandkids and great grandkids to fish on the lake. As a person that has a domestic supply of water it is important that we protect the water. We only have the local hills to give us water. We don't have any other water. We have to keep this from being contaminated. There is a possibility that the way we are working the program that the mussel could get in our water system, this could close up all the pipes. Maybe there is a program to keep the mussels out. If no foolproof program to keep them out you should restrict the boats until there is a program so we know they won't get in. The point is to act now, not two to three months from now until we come up with a feasible program. If there is no hazard of them getting in then continue what you are doing.

Dick Barnett – worked for Casitas for 38 years. We know that we have faced some serious water quality issues over the years. The solution was to work with other agencies that have experts. It is up to us to let the other people in the district to become informed. It is a statewide problem. We should form a task force with ACWA to come together with experts and consultants to get more information and to educate the people.

Dennis Harper – I live in Ventura and am the VP Conservation Chairman for the Sespe Fly Fishers. I raised a corollary to the New Zealand Mud Snail. It has similar characteristics and is also prolific, 1 million snails per sq meter. It lives off microorganisms of the streams and lakes and it can decimate the population of a lake. It is transmitted by individuals on waders, fishing equipment, boats, waters, float tubes anything that moves from one body of water to another. There was aggressive posting and communication with fisherman. The bad news is that over the last four years we can't stop the snails. They spread rapidly and are in many of the rivers of the state. Last month it was found in Lake Shasta. The point is that given the ability these invasive species continue to spread. I encourage the board to consider how they have spread and how that might apply to the Quagga mussels. I would support a moratorium on access to the lake until there is a good handle on it. Cost of prevention is less than the cost of dealing with the system if it becomes invaded. It is a tough problem and there is no easy answer. Keeping them out seems to be the first major step.

Norm Platt – Ojai native suggested that to not look at this would be irresponsible. He hopes that the information here today is taken responsibly. Do some preventative measures. We have seen what a fish has done to this board

for a fish that needs hiking boots for eight months of the year. It is a difficult problem. Hopefully the approach will take care of it.

Norm Smith – spoke as a concerned citizen, water user, vendor at the lake and bass fisherman with a new boat. He commended the board on taking these steps to prevent this from coming into the lake. There is no problem in our area now. We are doing the first step. We will learn as we go along that we will be able to prevent this from happening. Tournament bass fishermen are a big asset to us. Allowing them to continue fishing and the spreading of the information is really important. The casual boat users are the people we have to look out for. When we are done with our boats we wipe them down, clean them out. The financial impact of this could be major to me. I do not believe that there is any reason to shut the lake down. We are doing something that no one else is doing. I commend you for that. Continue to work towards a solution and not stop bass fisherman from fishing.

Park Services Manager Brian Roney explained that we are ahead of the curve on other lake operators. We have had monitoring stations in the lake for three years with Portland University. They are inspected weekly. There is no sign of the Quagga mussel. The Fisheries Biologist snorkeled in the marina and the Lab Manager will be doing super microscopic surveys. Mr. Wickstrum added we just got the net and will be sampling the lake water. Mr. Roney continued by explaining that we revised our ordinance to inspect the boats and refuse entry. We are one of the first lakes to do mandatory inspections. He encouraged DFG and Boating & Waterways to get more involved. Some of the impacts that could occur should the lake be closed to boating are some legal issues with Boating and Waterways grants, they could come back for repayment of those grants. Refunds for annual permits for vehicles, boats, and camping reservations would have to be made. There are impacts to concessionaires. Only two that would benefit and they don't want to benefit under these circumstances. We do have some legal protection to close the lake. There is impact to local economy – not just the local business but state and federal taxes from gas and hotels. There would be a minor reduction in traffic on 33, 150 and Santa Ana Road. This is a serious public relations issue. We have been flooded with calls with the short notice. The Recreation budget will be seriously impacted. Some of the people might not know that we are operated as an enterprise fund. We are not subsidized. Direct boating revenue from 06-07 was \$195,000 from boating activities, boat storage, daily fees, day use of vehicles, and an additional \$500,000 from related issues such as camping, day use, concession fees. This is a total of \$695,000 impact to the budget. There are a few minor issues for staff to work out the criteria for what boats come and go etc. It is staff's recommendation to table this matter until there is more information and more development with DFG and Boating & Waterways.

Director Hicks asked Brian Roney to share with the audience about the one boater that we asked to clean his bilge. Mr. Roney said there was a boater at the lake with dirty standing water in live wells and the bilge. It was considered suspect and he was refused access to lake. He demanded entry and we

suggested he bleach out the areas. He refused and he tried to launch his boat and now has been evicted from the lake.

Mr. Wickstrum commented on his conversation with the Department of Boating & Waterways and he asked them if they have looked into the possibility of building wash racks. If we can get them established at sites where we have the problems it may limit the migration. This bill was passed, and a large burden placed on Fish & Game without a lot of funding. Boating & Waterways might help.

President Word asked if there were any more members of the public that wished to speak and hearing none he thanked everyone for taking time and coming without any big notice or advanced notice. The issue is of concern to us. This was not intended to be a meeting to take action. It was to gather additional information. We need to continue to gather information and look at ways to respond to this issue. There is not an easy answer to this situation. We will try to find some more solutions.

Director Hicks said Chuck Montag hit it on the head. We are the only ones that rely solely on this water. We don't get water from anywhere else. We have to make the right decision for everybody. You share a little pain, if we have to shut the lake down for a short period of time until we get a handle on this. Hoping you would see that side of it. If we get the infection we are in trouble. We have a tough decision to make. We are trying to protect our water supply.

Richard Handley added that Casitas is the primary purveyor of water in Ventura County. We run a budget that is close in costs. Rates are reasonable, not a lot of excess dollars. If we did get a Quagga mussel infestation it would devastate this district. The cost incurred to clean mussels would be prohibitive. This is really a critical issue to make the right decision to continue to supply water to all our customers. In my opinion our primary responsibility is to water users and to maintain a viable water system. I am not in favor of closing the lake. If we restrict use or come up with another way of storage and be sure boats are clear of Quagga. I would not want to shut out any fisherman in this regard. He thanked the public for sharing and for coming tonight.

Director Kaiser added this is a problem that will be with us for a long time. We need to look at how to attack it now and in the future. Possibility of cleaning rack, education, inspection, eradication through cleaning station, maintain water system to make sure invasive species do not get into our lake. Have a varied and mutual responsibility to provide water to our rate payers.

President Word stated this was an informational session and direction to staff is to continue with what you are doing, collect information and continue to see what we can find out about cleaning stations, hard costs, participation with Boating and Waterways to explore this. He suggested we revisit this at the first meeting in February. He continued that does not mean action will be taken but we will revisit this with new information. There are all kinds of issues with

restricting access to boats only at the lake. It could be a partial solution. Mr. Wickstrum added that with any solution there are a lot of things to be ironed out to move through. It has to be well thought out. Staff resource needs to be discussed because Rob and the staff put in a lot of time and effort and we are not in our busy season yet. President Word thanked the Department of Fish & Game and the tournament folks for their efforts.

A member of the public asked for DMV to get flyers out to boat owners. He responded that was done in February. Mr. Giusti commented on the dog training program and right now they are being trained for wardens. There is no reason another state agency could not own a dog or train their own dog.

Liz Mason from Cachuma said if we compel other area lakes to do inspections that would be great. Other area lakes and not doing inspections. We need to compel other lake managers to start to do that for further protection to our lakes.

President Word adjourned the meeting at 6:34 p.m.

Secretary