

Inspectors: Oregon's defense against invasive species

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The two Brookings boating inspection station officials are Dave Padgett and Christen Jamsa.

Padgett is pursuing a bachelor's degree in fisheries and wildlife at Oregon State University. He's a permanent resident of Brookings, completing his college courses online.

Jamsa, who lives in Gold Beach, has a bachelor's degree in criminal justice and also a master's in business administration from the University of Phoenix.

Interestingly, neither has a background in line with their current duties.

Padgett lived in Idaho for 35 years, working in information technology, before looking for opportunities to work outdoors. He previously worked as a park ranger at Harris Beach State Park in Brookings.

Jamsa was a military police officer stationed in California. She said she loves surfing, tide pools and whale watching, and wanted to help make a difference in her community.

Her experience as a law enforcement officer, she said, helps her calm people down. And she's used to doing inspections such as the ones she conducts at the Brookings boating station.

To help locate any invasives, the inspectors run their hands below the waterline of the boat, feeling for them first. Still, these can be hard to detect due to the texture of the vessel. What they find in most instances is only one or two shells, usually dead.

New Zealand and Japanese mud snails are a more prominent issue with kayaks, and not as prolific as mussels.

Trailers, motors, and every nook and cranny are thoroughly searched, sometimes with the use of a flashlight or even a mirror.

The inspectors said they mostly interact with privately-owned family boats, drift boats and kayaks, primarily used for fishing and recreation.

More often than not, it's the surfboarders, or the owners of otherwise non-motorized watercraft, who don't realize they are required to stop, they said.

"The vast majority are incredibly friendly and are usually repeat customers," said Padgett. "A couple of grumpy people, but it's five to seven minutes tops."

One might think a job like this could get boring, but Jamsa said that wasn't the case for her. The job gets slow, but she's not easily bored. "It's just another 'military' thing. There's always something to do."

Despite their different backgrounds, both Padgett and Jamsa said they're motivated to protect the environment and their community from the potential threat of invasive species.

"[We] have a little display where they can look at the (boat)piping and see how severe the clogging can become," said Jamsa. "[They're] usually totally compliant after being educated.

"Usually, people think they're being checked for registration. We just had one guy say that he's going to tell all his surfer friends about the stop."

Although some boaters are annoyed by the inspections, Jamsa said, by the end they go off waving.

Before pandemic-caused social distancing became the norm, inspectors often had opportunities to talk with boat owners at their stations. Today, boaters and drivers are not allowed to get out of their vehicles. The six feet of social distancing is enforced.

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