

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

August 7, 2025

The Honorable Doug Burgum
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

The Honorable Brooke Rollins
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Burgum and Secretary Rollins,

We write to request an update on the implementation of the Expanding Public Lands Outdoor Recreation Experiences (EXPLORE) Act, Public Law 118-234. In light of recent news that invasive zebra mussels have been found in the Colorado River and in other waterways in Western Colorado, we specifically request an update on your efforts to implement Section 128: Aquatic Resource Activities Assistance.

Invasive zebra mussels reproduce and spread quickly, often attaching to watercraft and moving quickly through different bodies of water. Zebra mussels are particularly dangerous for water infrastructure, as they can attach to, clog, or block water storage, treatment, and distribution systems—potentially causing millions of dollars of damage. Without natural predators, the mussels also damage ecosystems, which has led to the loss of larger fish in the Great Lakes and resultant declines in outdoor recreation and impacts to local economies.

Zebra mussels have recently been discovered in the Colorado River and other bodies of water along Colorado's Western Slope, including Eagle County and outside of Grand Junction. More than 40 million people across seven states rely on the Colorado River Basin, and the spread of these invasive species into this critical body of water could have devastating impacts for many communities across the West.

The EXPLORE Act was signed into law in the 118th Congress, which included additional authorities for the Department of Interior (DOI) and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to respond to and monitor aquatic invasive species, including zebra mussels, and established a Vessel Inspection and Decontamination Station grant program for Reclamation States in Section 128: Aquatic Resource Activities Assistance. We understand the many pressures on your agencies, but request that you prioritize the implementation of these provisions in light of the threat facing our waterways and rivers in the West.


We request responses to the following questions by August 29, 2025:

1. What is the status of implementation of Section 128 of Public Law 118-234, including the status of the Grant Program for Reclamation States outlined in Section 128 (c)? When do you anticipate fully implementing the authorities provided within Section 128?
2. What actions have DOI and USDA taken to combat the spread of quagga and zebra mussels throughout our nation's waterways?
3. What agency resources have been allocated to address the threat of invasive mussels by DOI and USDA?

4. Have DOI and USDA offered assistance to the State of Colorado to combat the spread of the invasive mussels?

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Joe Neguse
Member of Congress



Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator



John Hickenlooper
United States Senator