100th Meridian Initiative May Prevent Westward Spread of Zebra Mussels

by Bob Pitman

Coordinated activities concentrated along the 100th meridian present a unique opportunity to stop or slow the westward spread of zebra mussels and other ANS. The 100th meridian is the longitudinal line that defines the north-south border between Oklahoma and Texas, crossing the western sections of Texas and Oklahoma, and central Kansas, Nebraska, South and North Dakota, and the Canadian province of Manitoba (see map). At present, no states west of the 100th meridian other than Oklahoma are known to have populations of zebra mussels. The primary way zebra mussels could spread west is by being carried overland on trailered boats and other contaminated equipment. Areas at risk include waters over a large portion of North America and many federal, state, tribal, and private water projects that would be severely affected by zebra mussels. In a recent survey of boats entering Lake Powell, California, trailered from states with zebra mussel infestations, 27 boats had mussels attached. But because the pathway is known, it is now possible to greatly reduce the chances of any further westward spread.

The 100th Meridian Initiative is intended to be a major partnership effort. Collaboration among federal, state, and provincial agencies, tribal governments, municipalities, nongovernmental organizations, businesses, and industries is essential for a this partnership to function effectively. A principle component of the Initiative will focus on voluntary inspections and cleaning of boats and trailers being towed westward through 100th meridian states, supported and facilitated by a comprehensive information and education campaign. The inspection efforts will also generate data that will help to determine the extent of westward transport of zebra mussels and other ANS. High risk waters throughout the West will be monitored for zebra mussel infestations, and rapid-response plans to eradicate or contain new infestations will be developed and put in place.

Groups and individuals that frequently move potentially contaminated boats or other equipment westward from infested waters, such as commercial boat transport companies and participants in professional fishing tournaments, are more likely to transport zebra mussels and other ANS and so will be a focus of the Initiative. These companies and individuals will be encouraged to participate and assisted in reducing the risk associated with their activities through educational outreach and technical assistance.

With limited funding appropriated to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to lead the 100th Meridian Initiative, ways to create partnerships with other federal agencies, state agencies, potentially affected trade organizations, and other interested groups are being explored. Several western agencies, industries, and programs have already expressed their willingness to contribute to the Initiative. The Fish and Wildlife Service will use its funds and any additional contributions to help those states straddling the 100th meridian to defray costs related to this effort. The Western Regional Panel of the ANS Task Force will provide coordination, guidance, and advice for the successful operation of this network.

We have the opportunity, and share the responsibility, to protect noninfected watersheds for as long as possible.

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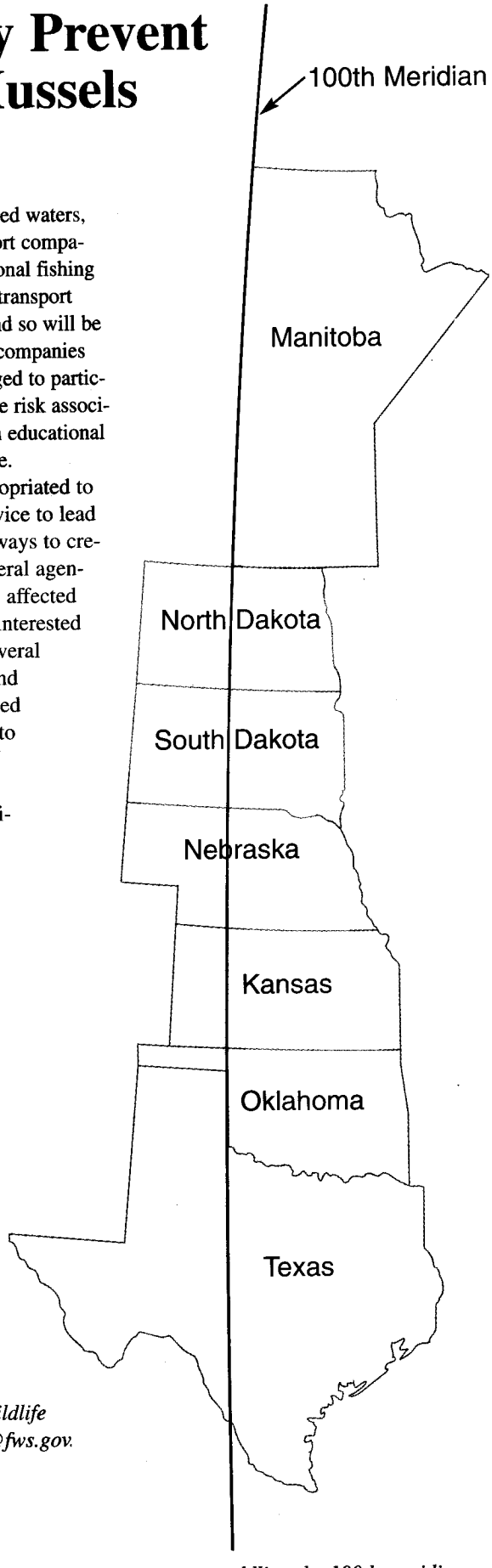

States and Province straddling the 100th meridian