



RICK BOWMER/AP

Supporters of the Equal Rights Amendment rally recently at the Utah State Capitol.

Push to ratify ERA launched in Utah despite opposition

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST AND SARAH RANKIN
Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY — A renewed national push to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment has come to conservative Utah, where supporters have launched a long-shot bid to become the tipping point state, despite opposition from the influential Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Utah is one of several conservative-leaning states where supporters hope to make inroads regarding the amendment that would explicitly enshrine equality for women in the U.S. Constitution.

ERA opponents in Utah turned out with signs and chants at a rally announcing the effort, and leaders of the state's predominant faith, often known as the Mormon church, reaffirmed its more-than three decades of opposition.

Democratic state Rep. Karen Kwan was undeterred in her support of the amendment. She's aiming to convince her GOP colleagues in the Legislature by pointing to an 1895 amendment to the state

constitution that guarantees equal "civil, political and religious rights."

Kwan is sponsoring a bill for the 2020 legislative session that she hopes will make Utah the 38th state to ratify the ERA. That's a key number that would meet the constitutional threshold for approval if other challenges can be overcome.

Virginia, however, could get there first after Democrats won control of the Legislature this year for the first time in a generation.

In addition, supporters are weighing new pitches in states such as Georgia, North Carolina, Arizona and Florida, said Carol Jenkins, co-president and CEO of the nationwide ERA Coalition.

However, even if more states join the effort, challenges would remain for the ERA, including a 1982 ratification deadline previously set by Congress and a move by five states to withdraw support.

In Utah, Kwan said that ratification would be worthwhile, even if the state isn't No. 38.

"It's about sending that message of love and respect (about) how much we val-

ue our women," Kwan said following a launch event that drew 200 supporters.

About 40 people came out to protest the launch, saying the ERA language is too broad and could erode protections for women and girls such as workplace accommodations during pregnancies.

Art student Amanda Fisher, 23, said she's worried it could result in fewer restrictions on abortions.

"It kind of seems to be a cover to really make it hard to protect unborn children," she said.

ERA supporters say it isn't about abortion, and laws that protect women aren't under threat. They point out that Utah's own equal rights clause didn't prevent the state from passing new abortion restrictions this year.

The opposition from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, meanwhile, could prove formidable since the vast majority of Utah lawmakers are members. The faith said decades ago that the ERA could erode family values, and its members worked against the amendment in states such as Virginia, Florida and Missouri.

N.J. town manages to muscle out giant invasive mussels

By WAYNE PARRY
Associated Press

FRANKLIN TOWNSHIP, N.J. — Most Americans know mussels as big as dinner plates has recently been wiped out from a New Jersey pond, where they had threatened to spread to the nearby Delaware River and wreak ecological havoc, as they already are doing in other parts of the world.

Federal wildlife officials and a New Jersey conservation group say they're confident they have narrowly avoided a serious environmental problem by eradicating Chinese pond mussels from a former fish farm in Hunterdon County. The mussels, in larvae form, hitched a ride to this country inside the gills of Asian carp that were imported for the Huey Property in Franklin Township and quickly began reproducing. Unlike the mussels many Americans know, these ones can approach the size of footballs.

Their size and appetite enable them to out-compete native species for food and space. In many spots in Europe, the Chinese mussels have taken over waterways and pushed out not only native shellfish species, but also have altered river bottom conditions, harming or chasing away some species of fish.

"They can become a huge ecological nightmare," said Emile DeVito, manager of science for the New Jersey Conservation Foundation. His group bought the land from private owners in 2007 and preserved it as open space. Three years later, the presence of the Chinese mussels was discovered, causing great alarm. The nine deep ponds are at the headwaters of the Wickcheoke Creek, which



WAYNE PARRY/AP

Wildlife officials hold dead Chinese pond mussels found in a network of ponds in Franklin Township, N.J.

flows into the Delaware River.

Had the mussels spread there, they could wipe out not only native shellfish, but also harm river bottom conditions upon which commercially and recreationally important fish depend, including shad and sturgeon.

The infestation was the first in North America, according to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, which partnered with the New Jersey group on a plan to eradicate them.

First, the water levels were lowered in the ponds, killing the fish in them, which also included some invasive bighead carp, themselves a potentially serious environmental problem if they had escaped into nearby waterways.

Then a copper-based algae killer that also kills mollusks was introduced to the muddy bottoms. Beth Freiday, of the wildlife service, said officials are confident all the mussels were killed, although DNA testing is planned for next spring or summer to verify that.

Dozens of giant black shells from dead mussels were plucked from the mud, giving officials a glimpse of just how large the invasive shellfish grow.

They come from the Amur and Yangtze rivers in China, and in some places are used to cultivate pearls.

They can live 12 to 14 years.

Infestations have been found in the Czech Republic, Italy, France, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Spain, Slovenia, Sweden and Ukraine. They also have turned up in Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic and the Philippines.

Eradicating them has proven much trickier because lowering water levels is either impossible or impractical without killing virtually everything in a river. Ditto for applying chemicals to kill the mussels, particularly in fast-flowing waterways.

Several European scientists and researchers said they knew of no sustained efforts to eradicate the Chinese mussels from waterways there, saying the problem has already become too big to solve in some places. That is due mainly to their widespread distribution and the impracticality of treating an entire river with chemicals.

That's why wildlife officials in New Jersey were so happy to nip their own mussel problem in the bud while they still could.

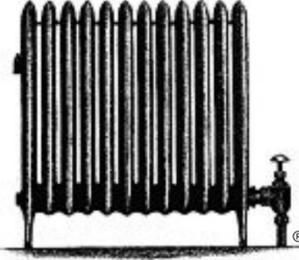
"Under certain conditions, this invasive species could have spread across the eastern U.S., with New Jersey at the epicenter," said Eric Schradling, the wildlife service's New Jersey field office supervisor.

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