

## Agreement cuts red tape for milfoil control program

By [staff1](#) on July 24, 2013



Dave Caswell of the Okanagan Basin Water Board harvests milfoil off Haynes Point. In the summer, the milfoil is cut and pulled out of the water, but not uprooted. In the winter, it's pulled up by the roots. (Photo by Richard McGuire)

The provincial government has given the Okanagan Basic Water Board (OBWB) the green light to carry out its milfoil control program for the next five years.

Prior to the agreement announced last week, the OBWB had to notify the Province of British Columbia at least twice a year, even though milfoil operations were consistent during the past several decades.

The need for frequent notification caused delays and made planning difficult, OBWB officials say.

“That’s just so positive,” Osoyoos Mayor Stu Wells, chair of the OBWB, said of the recent agreement.

In the past, the provincial Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations (FLNRO) has expressed concerns that rototilling of milfoil may have a negative impact on native mussels living in the Okanagan lakes, including the Rocky Mountain ridged mussel.

Eurasian milfoil is an invasive water plant first observed in B.C. in the 1970s. It has been spread throughout many lakes in North America, primarily by boaters.

Milfoil grows in water up to six metres deep and it forms thick mats on the surface of the water. Dense growth adversely affects water quality, species habitat and recreational use of lakes.

Under the agreement, milfoil control must take place between July 1 and April 1, said James Littley, OBWB office and project manager.

Rototilling and harvesting cannot take place through April, May and June due to federal government concerns about protecting small and large mouth bass, Littley said.

During the winter, OBWB uses rototilling to pull milfoil up by the roots, a practice that inhibits future growth.

In summer, the weed is just cut, but not uprooted, and the cut weed is harvested from the water, clearing areas of the lake for swimming and boating.

The rototilling is the most effective, both Littley and Wells say, although it was this procedure that caused the most concern for the province.

“Rototilling is what’s really effective in the winter because we’ve de-rooted it,” said Littley.

“We’ve noticed over a couple decades since we began rototilling that once we rototill an area for consecutive years, it takes quite a while for the weeds to rebound.”

This summer’s harvest program was delayed about two weeks due to the process required for the five-year permit, but summer harvesting got underway on Osoyoos Lake on July 16.

“This year we’re a little behind where we would like to be, but our operators are working longer shifts and more days to make up for lost time,” said Littley.

“In the long-term though, this plan will allow us more flexibility and allow us to make greater headway in reducing the density in really troubled areas.”

As a condition of the agreement, certain areas sensitive for the mussels cannot be rototilled, Littley said.

Some of these are at the north end of the lake where water and sediment come into the lake.

Also along with the new five-year permit, a mussel expert will monitor the operations for their impact on the mussels.

The milfoil program was initially run by the province, but in the 1990s it was turned over to the OBWB and funded by local taxpayers, Littley said.

It has only been in the last few years that the province has required frequent notification, he added.

BY RICHARD McGUIRE

Osoyoos Times