

## CENTRAL OKANAGAN Monitoring mussels

by Jim Judd - Kelowna - Story: 97512  
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Photo: Contributed - Lisa Scott

A cluster of Quagga mussels. The Okanagan and Similkameen Invasive Species Society is urging B.C. boaters to clean their vessels properly in order to prevent the spread of two invasive mussel species found in eastern Canada and the U.S.

Invasive mussels - they aren't here yet and we don't want them. That is the message being reinforced by the Okanagan and Similkameen Invasive Species Society (OASISS).

The non-profit society has collaborated with several organizations this summer to spread the message about keeping zebra and quagga mussels out of the Okanagan-Similkameen. These invasive European mussels are not believed to occur in B.C., but could easily be transported here from infested lakes in the United States or the Great Lakes region of Canada. They were introduced to North America in the late 1980s.

Currently, there are no mandatory check point stations in BC, unlike western US states such as Idaho where you cannot launch a boat unless you have been inspected. So the Okanagan-based society launched a campaign this summer to educate recreational boaters about the dangers of invasive mussels and what they can do to prevent their spread.

"It would only take one boat infested with mussels to enter a lake in BC. and there would be no turning back. We are trying to encourage everyone to take responsibility to help prevent invasive mussels from entering our waters," explained local biologist Lisa Scott, who is also the coordinator of OASISS.

Zebra and quagga mussels are thumbnail sized, freshwater mollusks that rapidly colonize hard surfaces and can clog water-intake structures, impact recreation and devastate local fisheries. In the Okanagan-Similkameen, the effects of their invasion would be felt at the commercial activity level, throughout the tourism sector and at the ecological level.

Direct costs and lost revenues are estimated to be in excess of \$45 million per year if mussels were to invade Okanagan Lake.

The society has partnered with local yacht clubs, marinas and other organizations to set up monitoring stations near boat launches in Osoyoos, Skaha, Okanagan and Kalamalka Lakes. The vertical stations consist of a series of small sections of PVC pipe and mesh attached to a rope, and are deployed in depths of up to 8-metres. These stations provide an artificial surface for the invasive mussels to attach to. A sensor is also attached to the apparatus to record temperature and light.

Members of OASISS and partner organizations will monitor the surfaces monthly until late September, when it will be removed for the winter. Then the process will start all over again next May.

“We are highly optimistic that we won’t find anything, however it’s important we monitor to be sure the mussels have not arrived,” said Scott.

For more information on European mussels and other invasive species, go [here](#)  
The aquatic invaders program is financially supported through the Canada Summer Jobs program and a \$30,000 grant from the Okanagan Basin Water Board.

“We are pleased to provide funds to OASISS for this very important project. It’s been complementary to our Don’t Move a Mussel campaign, which is aimed at educating Okanagan residents and visitors to the risks these invasive mussels present,” stated Anna Warwick Sears, the water board’s executive director.

OASISS is non-profit organization that is dedicated to working collaboratively to prevent, monitor and control the spread of invasive species in the Okanagan-Similkameen region.