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# Mussels spread avoided

**RICHARD ROLKE**  
*Morning Star Staff*

The Okanagan escaped a close call with an invasive species that has devastated ecosystems across North America.

On March 12, a Canada Customs official at the Osoyoos border crossing stopped a vehicle pulling a boat from Texas. It was headed for moorage in Okanagan Lake and it was infested with what was believed to be zebra or quagga mussels.

"It's because of the awareness raised by the Okanagan Basin Water Board that the customs officer acted," said Juliette Cunningham, an OBWB director.

The federal customs officer had no legislative authority to refuse entry to the vehicle, but the truck driver co-operated and B.C. conservation officers were contacted.

A decontamination unit was sent to the scene.

The mussels are native to Europe but were introduced to North America and since then, they have spread across the continent, clogging water intake pipes, pumps and boat motors. They also deplete food sources for fish and produce toxins that kill fish and birds and contaminate drinking water.

There is also a recreational impact as the razor-sharp shells can spread across beaches.

The OBWB has suggested it could cost \$43 million a year to manage the mussels if they arrive in the valley.

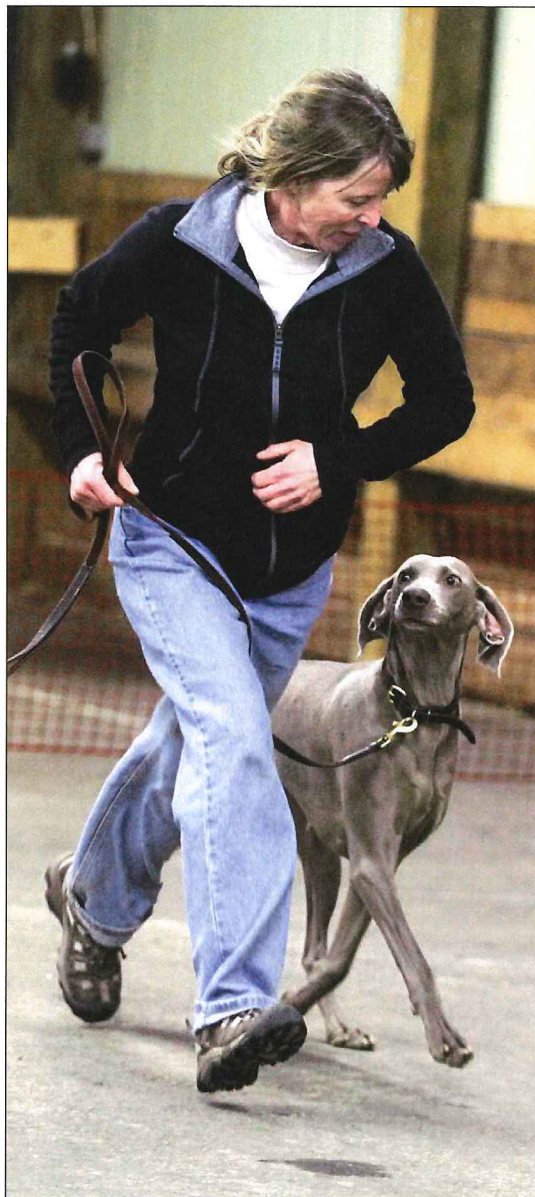
Because of the potential risk, OBWB has been lobbying the federal government to permit border guards to inspect boats and prohibit entry of any contaminated vessels. It also wants the provincial government to create an inspection program.

A report suggests that 19 per cent of the infected boats stopped in Idaho in the last five years were on their way to B.C. and Alberta.



Cunningham

## TRIAL RUN



LISA VANDERVELDE/MORNING STAR

Shirley Nilsson warms up with her Weimaraner Betty Saturday at the Okanagan Valley Obedience Training Club dog trials at the IPE grounds in Armstrong.

# Directors regret arena decision

**RICHARD ROLKE**  
*Morning Star Staff*

Similar to cracks in ice, fractures are developing over a proposed new arena in Greater Vernon.

Directors Bob Fleming and Mike Macnabb used the Regional District of North Okanagan meeting Wednesday to reverse their positions on a previous decision to hold a referendum to fund a replacement ice sheet and decommission Civic Arena as an ice facility.

"I am suffering from voter regret," said Fleming of the motion approved at the Greater Vernon Advisory Committee March 11. "It (motion) includes things that are premature and inappropriate."

Fleming suggests the motion could be interpreted to cover the cost of demolishing Civic.

In speaking to the board, Macnabb stated that the March 11 motion did not include those costs.

"When we go to referendum, we have to tell the public what it costs," he said, adding that he's also not convinced that Civic needs to be abandoned as an ice sheet.

"It's by no means on its last legs."

An engineering assessment was recently conducted of the 1938 Civic Arena, plus a 1979 renovation. The report suggests it would cost \$1.5 million to replace the slab surface, which is at risk from a deteriorating brine (refrigeration) system.

The engineering report also says an immediate \$100,000 in life and safety upgrades would be needed if Civic remains open while short-term upgrades of \$5.6 million would be needed in two to five years.

Fleming says spending \$1.6 million on a new slab and safety concerns at Civic may be more cost-effective than \$5 million on a new arena.

"I didn't realize we were writing off Civic when we voted for this (March 11)," he said.

That brought a quick response from director Juliette Cunningham, who is GVAC chairperson.

"I'm surprised you're surprised because we had this discussion at GVAC," she said.

Cunningham insists that the exact price of a new arena will be determined before there is a final move to go to referendum.

"When you look at the costs involved in Band-Aids at Civic, they're significant. After 10 years, you probably still would have to look at replacing it," she said.

Director Doug Dirk pointed out that Civic runs a \$160,000 annual operating deficit and moving towards a referendum doesn't mean a new facility will actually be constructed.

"If people don't approve twinning Kal Tire Place or Priest Valley Arena, Civic will be looked at and the upgrades will go ahead," he said.

Fleming and Macnabb were referred to as obstructionist by director Mary-Jo O'Keefe, who is convinced Civic Arena will not be usable.

"We don't want the same sort of failure as occurred in Armstrong when they didn't respond fast enough to an aging facility," she said.

Fleming continued to defend his case.

"Information is what we're looking for and we're not trying to be obstructionist," he said.

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