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New rules fight mussels



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by [Alistair Waters](#) - Vernon Morning Star
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Better late than never.

That was how the chairperson of the Okanagan Basin Water Board summed up the announcement that the federal government was finally proposing new regulations to help fight off an possible invasion of zebra and quagga mussels into local lakes and waterways.

The water board has had a campaign calling for better monitoring for the invasive species mussels on boats entering B.C. for the last two-and-a-half years. The campaign is dubbed "Don't Move A Mussel."

While the mussels have not been introduced to any lake in B.C. there have been some close calls, the most recent earlier this year when an alert board guard at Osoyoos spotted a boat on a trailer entering from Washington and discovered it had some of the mussels attached to it.

The mussels are in several lakes south of the border and are feared by many here because they clog up pipes, destroy other water-born wildlife and cost millions to try and get rid of once they have arrived.

So, after years of calling on the federal government for help. Ottawa appears to finally be acting.

“It’s better late than never,” said Doug Findlater, who heads the OBWB board. “But we have our fingers crossed they will be in place for next year’s boating season.”

Findlater said as it now stands, rules in U.S. states such as California, Oregon and Washington are currently B.C.’s only line of defence against the mussels entering the province. Those states, where the mussels have been found, have strict rules about cleaning boats, inside and outside after being used in a lake known to have the mussels present.

The new Canadian regulations will allow all provinces and territories to compel boat owners who are suspected of either intentionally or unintentionally transporting invasive species such as zebra of quagga mussels into Canada to cooperate with authorities in riding them from their boats before launching the vessels in local waters.

Okanagan-Coquihalla MP Dan Albas said the regulations are currently being put out for public comment and will be subject to the comment for the next 30 days. After public input is gathered, the federal Fisheries and Oceans Minister Gail Shea will review the comments and move the regulations closer to being enacted into law.

When asked why it has taken the federal government so long to act, Albas said it was because they had to apply to all provinces and the current rules about invasive species are not the same across Canada.

While the regulations are only expected to affect a small number of boaters, the Invasive Species Council of B.C. is encouraging all boaters to adopt its “Clean, Drain and Dry” program to prevent transporting any unwanted material into B.C. water bodies.

The new federal regulations will give Canadian Border Services Agency officers the ability to enforce prohibitions against the importation of invasive species at the border.