

news

Harvester takes on exploding milfoil growth

By **Laurena Weninger**
Osoyoos Times

Westbank's Gord Greer has been operating the Okanagan Basin Water Board's (OBWB) milfoil harvester for 28 years.

"It's like mowing a lawn. I'm going down six or seven feet," Greer said, pointing at the scissoring blades on the platform, which are submerged under Osoyoos Lake's surface to chop off the weed in a 2.4-metre swath.

Cast an eye across the surface of the lake and it's easy to pick up the rust-coloured hue where the tops of the milfoil strands are floating in large patches.

The weed is not native to North America, said Genevieve Dunbar, from the OBWB, adding it was first introduced to the Okanagan in the 1970s, likely near Vernon.

It spreads quickly, as plant fragments take root and while it is always present in lakes, some years are worse than others for its growth.

This year, the growth in Osoyoos Lake is particularly bad and there are a couple of possible reasons for that.

First, there was a change in the pattern of milfoil rototilling over the last couple of winters.

The rototilling process uses large blades to pull up the roots of the weed during the winter when the plant doesn't grow.

Those roots then float

compose.

But in early spring 2009, the weather temperatures were extreme.

It meant fewer hours of rototilling by heavy machinery.

This spring brought a few other changes in logistics and planning when it comes to battling the plant, said Dunbar.

But in spite of what is done with the rototilling, the weed growth seems to go through cycles.

This year, there is extra growth.

Nutrient content in the lake is another factor, but Dunbar said there is nothing unusual this season that could explain the growth.

Speculation that the mudslide in Oliver last month caused an extra nutrient injection is unlikely, she said – but even if the slide did cause more nutrients to enter the lake, they would not have affected the milfoil growth so quickly.

There are two milfoil harvesters in the Okanagan, servicing all of the local lakes.

The one on Osoyoos Lake will be out there for as long as it takes to clean up the plant.

"Until we get as much done as we can. We're playing it by ear," Dunbar said.

As Greer cuts the milfoil, it rides a ramp up to a platform on the lower level of the boat.

It sits there as he fills up his load, cutting rows through the milfoil patches.

Then he takes the load to shore and dumps it into a pile.

Those piles are then loaded into a truck and taken to the landfill and composted.

Dunbar said the milfoil will be cut only once this season and that will hopefully be enough to keep it down.

The milfoil causes problems in a couple of ways, Dunbar said.

It is unpleasant, interferes with swimming and can tangle around boat propellers.

It can also impede fish movements and, in large quantities, it can interfere with oxygen levels in the lake.

It changes water flow rate, lake conditions and generally affects the ecosystem of the lake, meaning it can spur algae growth.

The annual budget for the milfoil control program, including the harvesting and de-rooting in all Okanagan Valley lakes, is \$500,000.

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Pat Field of the Okanagan Basin Water Board scoops up milfoil from the shore of the north end of Osoyoos Lake and puts it in a truck headed for the Osoyoos Landfill. The milfoil is being "harvested" with a boat that cuts the weed off below the surface of the water. Photo by Laurena Weninger



PROPERTY TAX EXEMPTION

The Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen recognizes the significant value of volunteers, volunteer groups and agencies to the spiritual, educational, social, cultural, and physical well-being of the region.

These non-profit organizations have the opportunity to apply for a Property Tax Exemption. The following criteria will determine eligibility.

The applicant(s) must:

- **Qualify for an exemption under the provisions of the *Local Government Act*, the general authority for property tax exemptions. (Sections 809 and 810);**
- **Be in compliance with Regional District policies, plans, bylaws, and regulations (i.e. zoning);**
- **Be a non-profit organization;**
- **Not be in competition with for-profit business;**
- **Provide services or programs that are compatible or complementary to those offered by the Regional District.**
- **Provide a service that fulfills some basic need, or otherwise improves the quality of life for residents of the Regional District.**

Application forms are available online at www.rdos.bc.ca or at the RDOS office, 101 Martin Street, Penticton, BC.

The deadline for submitting completed application forms including supporting documentation is **JULY 31, 2010.**

Successful applicants may be asked to publicly acknowledge the exemption.

If you require further information, assistance completing your application or wish to view the Property Tax Exemption Policy, please call Warren Everton, Finance Manager at 250-490-4105 or email at weverton@rdos.bc.ca

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