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Water board tackling milfoil outbreak



Milfoil rototiller. (File Photo: Wayne Moore - Castanet)

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The Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) is putting in extra hours this winter, trying to get ahead of the outbreak of Eurasian Watermilfoil on Osoyoos Lake.

The north end of the lake experienced significant milfoil growth earlier in the year, prompting the Water Board's milfoil crew to focus much of its control efforts in the area last summer.

The OBWB takes a two-pronged approach to addressing milfoil in the Okanagan Basin, harvesting in the summer and rototilling in the winter.

Harvesting is essentially mowing the weed below the surface of the water, which only acts as a temporary solution.

Now that it's winter, the OBWB is pushing forward with its preferred method of control – rototilling, or de-rooting, explained Osoyoos Mayor and OBWB chair Stu Wells.

"Rototilling in winter is a much more effective method to get rid of the weed," says Wells, adding he's heard from a number of residents that they are happy to see the crew working the lake this winter.

“By removing the plant at the root and leaving it to shrivel and die in the cold water, the milfoil bed shrinks considerably.”

One result of the work has been milfoil washing up on some beaches along the lake.

It's important to understand that Eurasian Watermilfoil needs much warmer water to re-root.

In these colder temperatures, the milfoil simply decomposes. Indeed, if it is raked and put on people's gardens they are assured beautiful, rich compost in time for spring.

“With last summer's significant harvesting on the lake, Water Board staff ended up with more requests for the material than they could fill. In the meantime, we appreciate the public's patience as we continue to clean up the lake, maintaining property values and ensuring healthy water quality and safety for our recreational water users.”