



Canada/ US lake site of weed battle

Doris Janssen, CHBC News: Tuesday, July 19, 2011



A harvester pulls Eurasian watermilfoil from Osoyoos Lake. While Canadian officials routinely mow the invasive weed from the water, US officials want to use herbicide on their side as a control. Osoyoos Lake in Southern British Columbia is divided by the border.

Photo credit: Jeff Martin, CHBC News

A cross-border battle is heating up in the South Okanagan after Washington State announced plans to use a chemical herbicide to kill weeds in Osoyoos Lake.

Water officials on this side of the border say the chemical isn't approved for aquatic use in Canada, and say its impacts are unknown.

Now they're urging their American counterparts to drop their plans.

Eurasian water milfoil is mowed annual from Okanagan lakes, including Osoyoos Lake. But US officials are moving to remove the pesky weed with chemicals.

Osoyoos mayor Stu Wells is also the chairperson of the Okanagan Basin Water Board, which has written a letter to Okanogan County officials in the US urging them against herbicide use in Osoyoos Lake.

"There could be a current coming back up and pushing that product back up into Canada," says Wells. "I really don't think it bodes well for the good neighbour policy. This is a shared body of water."

Wells says the product in question could adversely affect the ecosystem and drinking water.

Rather than jumping to using extreme measures to rid Osoyoos Lake of milfoil, Wells says the root of the problem should be addressed first: getting more people living on the lake off septic systems and onto the public sewer system.

"All that growth is coming from phosphorous," says Wells. "If we can keep that out of the lake, there's our first step we should be making."

A spokesperson for the Okanogan County Noxious Weed Control Board says there were five milfoil-related drowning deaths in Washington State last year so their first concern is safety. They say any negative impact to native plants from using the herbicide has been found to be short-term.

Okanogan County has applied for a permit to use the herbicide but has yet to receive approval. If their application is allowed, they plan on spreading it over an area of about ten acres.

Although Washington State reports several milfoil-related drowning deaths from people becoming tangled in the weed and getting too exhausted to swim, there are no known reports in BC of milfoil causing drowning.

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