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Weed-munching weevils could be used to tackle Eurasian milfoil in Okanagan Lake.

Officials with the Okanagan Basin Water Board are considering using the beetles as a new form of biological control.

However, the tiny weevils sell for as much as \$1.20 apiece, raising questions whether the board could afford to buy enough of them to put a significant dent in the amount of weeds in the lake.

"The price is really motivating us to try to grow them ourselves," OBWB executive director Anna Warwick Sears said Friday during the agency's annual general meeting in Kelowna. "I think we can grow them less expensively."

If the project proceeds, thousands of the weevils would be released into the lake in the spring. The weevils are about two millimetres in length, and each one lives for about a month. Females produce about two eggs a day.

The weevils are said to eat only milfoil, and tests elsewhere have shown some promise in controlling the invasive weed.

Currently, the OBWB employs two methods to control the water weed: harvesting the top parts of the plants during the winter, and pulling them out by their roots in the summer.

In the late 1970s and early '80s, there were concerns that the rapid and unchecked spread of Eurasian milfoil would permanently disfigure Okanagan Lake and deal a devastating blow to the tourism industry.

The provincial government considered using the herbicide 2,4-D to kill the weeds, and it was injected into the water in a few locations. However, public opposition to the idea of applying chemicals to the lake, which supplies several municipal water systems, forestalled the wider use of 2,4-D.

The weeds grow only in water that's 46 centimetres to 5.5 metres deep. Further out, not enough sunlight reaches the base of the plant.

Although chemical treatments have not been used in B.C. for decades, officials in Washington state this year did use herbicides to try to control milfoil in Osoyoos Lake near the border town of Oroville.