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CAPITAL news



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Taking aim at invasive mussels



Local MLAs Norm Letnick (right) and Steve Thomson try out power spray technique to clean invasive mussels off the bottom of boats to prevent them from taking up residence in Okanagan Lake. The province is adding \$1.3 million to the existing invasive species early detection and rapid response initiatives. See story A12.

inside today



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Province steps up fight to combat freshwater invasive species

Alistair Waters
awaters@kelownacapnews.com

The provincial government is taking aim

at invasive mussels with a \$1.3-million boost for programs that focus on early detection and rapid response.

Through this program, teams will inspect and, if necessary, decontaminate boats entering B.C. from Alberta. They also will

respond to boats from the U.S. identified as a concern by the Canadian Border Services Agency, as well as U.S. partner agencies.

In an announcement made in Kelowna Tuesday morning by Environment Minister Mary Pollack, she said B.C. will work with a number of partners to keep zebra and quagga mussels out of the provincial waters, including Alberta and Washington, and the federal government, as well as the Canadian Border Security Agency and corporations like B.C. Hydro.

She said each crew will be equipped with mobile self-contained decontamination units.

The teams will consist of trained auxiliary conservation officers coming from university compliance training programs offered by Vancouver Island University, providing valuable experience for students and recent graduates

Twenty-four new highway signs featuring the Clean, Drain, Dry program are also being installed at significant entry points into the province.

"We want to make sure these little critters do not get into our lakes and waters," she said.

While the province's latest move doesn't go as far as the Okanagan Basin Water Board would have

liked, chairman Doug Findlater, Mayor of West Kelowna, said he's happy to see something being done.

He said the OBWB would likely watch how the new moves are going before renewing any calls for monitoring stations at all major road entrances to B.C.

Pollack said although these invasive species have never been detected in British Columbia, this program expansion increases protection of B.C.'s lakes and rivers against the threat of quagga and zebra mussels.

In a news release from her cabinet colleague Todd Stone, B.C. transportation minister,

Stone said: "My ministry is proud to be part of this important program. Preventing invasive mussel species from entering our province is crucial to protecting our waterways. I hope to see every boat entering B.C. clean, drained and dry."

On Tuesday in Kelowna, environment ministry officials gave a demonstration of how to clean, and dry boats that have been in the water to make sure they have no mussels attached.

They said while in most cases washing off boats would be good enough, boaters who use water bodies in the U.S. and Alberta need to be extra vigilant to help keep the destructive mussels from entering B.C.

It is estimated that if they were to get a foothold in B.C. waters, the damage they would create could cost hundreds of millions to repair because they not only clog up pipes they deplete the water they are in of nutrients for other aquatic life.

Aquatic invasive species, such as zebra and quagga mussels, pose a significant threat to B.C.'s and Canada's freshwater ecosystems, said local MLA Norm Letnick.

"Invasive mussels pose a threat to our agricultural producers who rely on effective irrigation systems, and so this program is very important to minimize potential financial risk."

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