

# CITY

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## WATER QUALITY

# Watersheds vulnerable

**North Okanagan water-quality manager says conservation officers stretched too thin to protect Valley watersheds**

By DON PLANT  
The Daily Courier

Too few conservation officers are available to keep mud-boggers out of sensitive watersheds in the North Okanagan, says the district's water-quality manager.

Renee Clark is working on a strategy to protect the dams that hold municipal reservoirs and the water people drink in the Vernon area. Yet only three conservation officers are available to patrol 56 watersheds in the Okanagan, she said.

"There's a lack of enforcement because there's only so many conservation officers and natural-resources officers out there... How do you enforce with so few people?"

A BC Parks officer told Clark that close to 500 people and more

than 100 four-by-fours, dirt bikes and ATVs swarmed Grizzly Lake, which provides a quarter of the drinking water to Greater Vernon, on the Victoria Day weekend.

If the dam fails because someone drives on it or people pollute the water, the regional district is liable. Even so, Clark realizes more campers from places such as Kelowna, Vernon and Alberta are eager to find places to play in the woods.

"It seems there aren't enough recreational sites, so people are camping where they can put their rigs in," she said. "There are no toilets. It's disturbing because this is our reservoir."

"Whatever comes down the creek, we have to treat it."

Local governments and water purveyors are frustrated because the province has told them they're responsible for "delivering safe drinking water. Yet they have no authority to keep people out of their watersheds."

Clark is searching for a legislative tool that would protect reservoirs and sensitive watersheds on Crown land. The regional district may need a licence of occupation, she said. It could also lease or even buy the land.

A district in the Kootenays has hired a conservation officer to patrol the watersheds. The North Okanagan Regional District employs a half-time conservation officer to patrol the Shuswap River. Clark wonders if that's the direction to go.

"We're not getting the service we need," she said. "If we owned it, we'd have the ability to enforce it. If it's a lease or a licence of occupation, we can bring in a CO or a natural-resources officer. We can gate people out of the areas."

That's fine with Tom Seifert, the Vernon ATV Club's former director of land use and trails. He has no problem with authorities keeping vehicles out of sensitive areas. But he says conservation officers or the BC Forest Service should reach out to recreational groups, whose members can monitor and police what's happening in the bush.

"They could do more by creating a better relationship with the clubs out there," Seifert said. "If there's a group of 20 of us club members

and there's a couple people (doing something) illegal, it's intimidating for them to have a group of us who quite often have cameras."

The forest service often hires a campground host to charge nominal fees and monitor campers at busy sites. The host maintains the toilets and makes sure people aren't taking their machines into lakes or sensitive areas, Seifert said.

Lakes like Grizzly, Haido, Island and Aberdeen are so busy some weekends, you can't find a campsite, he said.

"If the camping pressure is too high, there should be somebody there on site... You pay a fee at some of the more popular, larger sites where it warrants keeping a host there."

Clark plans to bring her findings to the NORD board in the coming weeks. If politicians decide to get a licence of occupation or lease for Grizzly Lake, stakeholders such as Telko, recreational clubs, forestry representatives and First Nations would have input.

"This is getting worse," Clark said. "It's getting to be a destination site."

## VALLEY IN BRIEF

### Maple Ridge man victim of carjacking

Three people are in custody after their involvement in what Kelowna police are describing as a carjacking.

A 37-year-old man from Maple Ridge was meeting with a woman he knew Monday afternoon in the 100 block of Nickel Road in Rutland.

He was ordered out of his car by a man who was armed with a weapon, the nature of which is not described by police. The Maple Ridge man ran away, while the man and woman got in his car and drove off.

A few hours later, police noticed the stolen car in downtown Kelowna. A surveillance operation was mounted, and the car was followed by police to the intersection of Barkley Road and Highway 97 in West Kelowna.

Arrested were a 25-year-old West Kelowna woman, a 26-year-old Kelowna man and a 45-year-old West Kelowna man.

Possible charges include possession of stolen property, robbery with a weapon and possession of a weapon for a dangerous purpose.

### Ride steam train at a discount

Slightly discounted fares are available for a special run of the Kettle Valley Steam Railway this Friday.

Fifty per cent of all proceeds from the charter run will go toward the Heart and Stroke Foundation.

Capacity on the Summerland train is 270 passengers, but there are only 100 tickets left for Friday's run at 4:15 p.m., says Bill Walraven of Heart and Sol Tours, who has organized the charter.

Adult fare for the 90-minute ride is \$22.50, and the seniors rate is \$19.15 (an amount that reflects the year the Kettle Valley Railway began operating). The fare for kids from four years old to 18 is \$15.50, and under four is by donation. All fares represent a saving over regular rates to ride the train.

For tickets, call 250-762-7167.

### Performances back at Woodhaven

A university program that mixes arts and environmentalism is back for another summer.

The Woodshed Reading Series, which features authors reading from their work and musical performances, starts again this Friday evening at the Woodhaven Eco Cultural Centre.

"There are few things more delightful than a summer evening of poetry and storytelling in the lovely woods of Woodhaven with a cluster of amazing Canadian authors," says organizer Nancy Holmes, a UBCO professor.

The first event, Friday at 7 p.m., features author Fred Stenson reading from his book *Who by Fire*, the story of an Alberta family concerned about the impact of a nearby gas plant. Nils Lowen will also play the cello.

For a full list of events, see the Woodshed Readings page on Facebook.

### IH laundry workers plan rally June 18

Interior Health laundry workers are still fighting to save their jobs.

The Hospital Employees' Union members will hold a rally June 18. It will start at noon at the Coast Capri Hotel. The workers and their supporters will march to M.L.A. Steve Thomson's office at Ethel Street and Springfield Road.

Interior Health has said it plans to contract out its laundry services and lay off 175 workers, including 70 in the Okanagan.

IH officials say the authority can't afford the extra \$16.5 million needed to upgrade outdated machines and infrastructure over the next 10 years. They've said unless they can be convinced otherwise, the current staff will be laid off in 2016.

— The Daily Courier

## ENVIRONMENT

### Boat checks for invasive mussels now underway

By Daily Courier Staff

Propellers and hulls of some boats being towed into B.C. are now being inspected to prevent an influx of mussels that pose a risk to provincial lakes.

The \$1.3-million government program, involving specially trained conservation officers conducting the boat checks, is aimed at stopping zebra and quagga mussels from reaching B.C. from neighbouring jurisdictions.

"Teams are now on B.C. roads performing boat and boat trailer inspections and, as necessary, decontaminating boats entering B.C.," Environment Minister Mary Polak said Wednesday.

"Mobile units have the flexibility to provide extended coverage near border crossings and throughout the province, especially on popular, high-traffic routes," Polak said.

The mussels have never been found in B.C., but they exist in other provinces and American states. Should they establish a presence here, officials say they could threaten native marine species, clog water intakes, foul beaches and increase maintenance costs for power-producing dams.

The Okanagan Basin Water Board, a creature of local governments, has been criticizing the province for not doing more to prevent the mussels' arrival in B.C.

Earlier this year, board chairman and West Kelowna Mayor Doug Findlater called on Victoria to establish mandatory inspection stations at all points of entry to the province, but the government has characterized this as unnecessary and too costly.

Polak says this summer's mussel-detection program, which also includes more signage and public education for boaters about the harmful effects of the mussels, could be expanded in 2016.



GARY NYLANDER/The Daily Courier

### Track meet

A Grade 5 student competes in the high jump during the Elementary School District 23 Track Meet Wednesday at Kelowna's Apple Bowl. Almost 1,000 boys and girls in Grades 4 to 6 competed in events including discus throw, shot put, high jump, triple jump, long jump, 100 metres, 800 metres and a 4 x 100-metres team relay. While the competition was for fun, Kelowna Track Club coaches were on hand looking for athletes.

## Drug store robber sought

A gunman held up a drug store in downtown Kelowna just before closing and got away with cash, say RCMP.

The bandit entered the front door of People's Drug Mart on Harvey at Ellis Street at 5:58 p.m. Tuesday. He confronted the only employee with a handgun and demanded money.

The employee was preparing to close the shop at 6 p.m. He handed an undisclosed amount to the

crook and was not hurt, police said. "He's OK — a bit shaken up," a woman working at the store said Wednesday.

The robber left the store and may have taken off on a bicycle or in a car. A police sniffer dog was unable to follow his scent.

Police have the store's video surveillance, said Const. Jesse O'Donoghue, but hadn't released images of the suspect by Wednesday afternoon.

The employee described him as dark-skinned (possibly aboriginal) and in his mid-20s with an average build. He's about five-foot-eight, and wore a black hat, blue shirt and shorts.

Investigators don't believe the suspect took part in Monday's attempted robbery at Okanagan Seasons Resort on Highway 33. Police arrested one man but are looking for his masked accomplice.

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