

Race boat driver hates mussels

Andrea Peacock | Posted: Tuesday, July 28, 2015 8:31 pm

Formula 1 tunnel boat racing driver Mike McLellan is on board with the fight against invasive mussels.

“After reading about the issue, I knew it was a concern for everyone who uses our lakes,” said McLellan Tuesday at a news conference organized by the Okanagan Basin Water Board. “It’s so important for all of us here that we protect our waters.”

McLellan hopes to raise awareness about the dangers of invasive zebra and quagga mussels through his involvement in the Formula 1 boat racing circuit in Canada and the U.S.

“We, as part of the U.S. F1 Tour in 2015, have a unique ability to promote the message, and that’s why we reached out to help spread the word,” he said.

When McLellan travels with his boat, he disassembles the motor so it is ready for inspection. He also has a video camera available with access to the boat’s hull to allow inspectors to ensure his boat is clean of mussels.

His experiences with inspection stations around North America have been positive, he said.

“It’s really a seamless thing to go through at the inspection stations. It’s easy, it doesn’t take long, and we’ve found the inspectors professional and very knowledgeable.”

Doug Findlater, chairman of the Okanagan Basin Water Board and mayor of West Kelowna, would like to see inspection stations set up along the B.C./Alberta border.

“It simply makes so much more sense to do this on a preventative basis rather than let it happen and then we’re all running around quarantining and cleaning up.”

Inspection stations would cost under \$5 million dollars a year, he said, compared to the estimated \$43 million a year in maintenance if a mussel infestation does arise.

“We have five routes into B.C. from the Alberta side. That’s not a lot,” said Findlater. “There is an opportunity there to lock down the border with inspections.”



Racing driver speaks out

Formula 1 tunnel boat driver Mike McLellan, left, of Kelowna speaks during a press conference as Doug Findlater, chairman of Okanagan Basin Water Board, looks at his boat at the Water Street boat launch on Tuesday. McLellan was on hand to support the water board’s Don’t Move A Mussel campaign.

Having these inspection stations would be an improvement over the current system of mobile inspection stations, said Corinne Jackson, spokesperson for the Okanagan Basin Water Board.

“Right now we are relying on phone calls from neighbouring jurisdictions who have the inspection stations and are calling to say there’s a boat on the way, get ready for it, and then we spring to action,” said Jackson. “We would rather have the inspection stations so that we are stopping them and we are not relying on our neighbours to phone us.”

Invasive mussels have not been detected in B.C.’s waters, but they do exist in other provinces and states in the U.S.

Officials say they could threaten native marine species, clog water intakes, plug boat motors and cause destruction to sandy beaches.