

news

Invasive mollusc of interest turns up at inspection workshop

Participants in an invasive mussel inspection workshop earlier this week got more than expected when a boat carrying the concerning

molluscs showed up for an actual inspection and decontamination, say event organizers. The workshop, held at Kelowna's Cook Street

Boat Launch parking lot Monday, was organized by the Okanagan Basin Water Board and its WaterWise program's Don't Move A Mussel

initiative in partnership with the B.C. Ministry of Environment. It was geared to marina and yacht club operators but included RCMP and local government bylaw staff, as well as Okanagan Nation Alliance fisheries representatives.

"It was an incredible opportunity to view the actual mussels on a

boat first-hand and then discover just how hard it is to detect them," said OBWB operations and project manager James Little.

An Ontario couple moving to the Lower Mainland owns the boat. It was moored in zebra mussel-infested Rideau Canal before being transported west.

The owner had inspected the boat before leaving Ontario. It was stopped on the weekend by Alberta inspectors and, when mussels were found, it was decontaminated.

Alberta called the B.C. Conservation Office in charge of inspection and decontamination, to tell them a boat was on its way. The boater was ordered to have a follow-up inspection in Kelowna.

Within minutes of the boat pulling in to where the training was taking place, B.C. inspectors detected several sand grain-sized mussels around the boat's legs, trim-tabs and props.

The boat had reportedly been out of water for 30 days and had been properly drained. Still, not taking any chances, after the inspection in the parking lot and taking a sample, the boat was moved to a gravel location for decontamination.

The mussel samples have been sent to a lab to determine if they were alive. It is illegal in B.C. to transport the mussels dead or alive.

According to provincial staff, there have been at least 15 high-risk boats decontaminated in B.C. so far this summer. Further testing suggests none had live mussels on board. However, several fines were issued, including for failure to stop at an inspection station.

Some of the boats were also quarantined to ensure they were out of the water and dry for 30 days.

News of this latest incident left OBWB chairman Doug Findlater shaking his head. "While B.C.'s Conservation Officer team is conscientious and taking this seriously, we still don't have a lock down system in place," he said.

"The fact that this boat had to go through two inspections and decontaminations, shows how difficult it is to fight this. If we are going to be successful in keeping these mussels out of our waters, it will take serious vigilance."

Findlater, the mayor of West Kelowna, said B.C. is still relying on others to let it know when an at-risk watercraft is coming into the province. "And we're relying on an honour system," he said.

"(These boaters) were asked to find their way to Kelowna to be checked and they did. That's great, but what if they hadn't, and what if they had live mussels and launched their boat in B.C.?"

Last March, the province announced \$575,000 in 2015-16 to help fight the mussels, with the majority of the money going to three roving inspection crews (with two COs each).

Another three roving teams were announced in July, with funding from Columbia Basin Trust.

The water board has called for permanent inspection stations where stopping is mandatory, as has been done in Alberta and many U.S. jurisdictions.

In particular, the OBWB has called for stations at the five main highway entry points on the B.C.-Alberta border.

The province has estimated each inspection station would cost \$60,000 to \$160,000 each (per year). Research done for the OBWB estimates an infestation would cost \$43 million to the Okanagan alone.

For prevention tips visit DontMoveAMussel.ca.

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