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## Milfoil growing like a weed

Wayne Moore - Apr 20, 2016 / 5:00 am



Photo: Wayne Moore - Castanet File Photo

Bill Ferguson is fed up with the proliferation of noxious weeds around the front of his complex next to Gyro Beach on Watt Road.

Ferguson says the nefarious Eurasian milfoil weed, abundant in parts of Okanagan Lake, is getting worse, instead of better. This despite efforts by the Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) to control the plant.

"When I moved here about 11 years ago, there were no weeds in front — it was nothing but sand," said Ferguson.

"About five, six years ago, the weeds started to blow in here. This year, I'm expecting to have trouble walking through the weeds to get to the boat."

He said it's been getting worse year over year, claiming the weed doubles in intensity every year.

Ferguson said it's not bad at the moment, but indicated you can see weeds growing now that wouldn't normally start until June.

"If you paddle over towards Rotary Beach and are out 100, 200 feet and you look down, you can see a lot of weeds growing already.

"During the summer, it's really bad here in front of our place."

The OBWB has been working to control the milfoil since the mid-1970s.

Project manager James Littlely said that while he believes they have a handle on the weed, last year was the worst he has seen in 30 years.

This year could be the same.

"If this El Nino thing lasts just a few years, it may just be a bad cycle. But if this is the new normal, we'll have to look long-term at increasing the amount of hours we're putting in and the type of technology we're using," said Littlely.

Ferguson said the OBWB is not, and has not, been using the proper technology in order to permanently remove the weeds.

He said the rototillers are just a waste of time and a waste of money.

"They have a machine that will go along the shoreline and, all it does is cut the roots and stir up the sand a little so some of the roots will float to the surface," he said.

It doesn't collect anything. The roots that do float up to the surface just wash over to the shoreline and re-seed themselves. The rototiller isn't doing anything. It's just spreading it around. It's pointless. It's a waste of money."

Ferguson is proposing a machine from Ontario-based Aqua Marine, which he claims will remove the whole plant.

"It will allow the sand to filter back down to the bottom. Now, we've collected the whole plant so there is nothing left to reseed itself," he said.

Littlely said that technology does not exist.

"I know of the machine he is talking about and I think there is a misunderstanding. All it is is a shallow water harvester. It just picks up the weeds the same as our harvester does but in shallow waters," he said.

He said they have discovered that hitting an area two or three years straight will decrease the intensity of the milfoil but will cause a new problem.

"One of the issues is when we remove the milfoil, the native aquatic weeds tend to come back thicker because their roots are deeper. And, of course, we're not allowed to target that and, frankly, people don't know the difference between their aquatic weeds."

The OBWB is open to new ideas and new technology in order to eradicate the Eurasian milfoil.

"I get calls from consultants all the time suggesting they may have something. We always look at that and always look at case studies," said Littlely.

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"We're not closed to new ideas, but for now what we have is the best available, and we're using it as best as possible."