



Servicing the Okana

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Current invasive mussel inspection efforts insufficient, says Okanagan Basin Water Board

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August 10, 2016 - 1:19 PM

BOARD CALLS FOR DAYLIGHT HOURS MONITORING; MANDATORY PRE-LAUNCH INSPECTIONS

OKANAGAN VALLEY - A form of Russian Roulette is how the Okanagan Basin Water Board chairman Doug Findlater describes current efforts to monitor for invasive quagga and zebra mussels.

"The inspection stations are only open ten hours a day," Findlater says. "What about the rest of the day. And what about the people who don't even bother to stop."

The province opened eight inspection stations April 1 and data to July 27 shows nine watercraft to be contaminated, all from Ontario.


Some 13,000 watercraft were inspected in that time and about a third of high-risk watercraft were identified as heading to the Okanagan Valley.

Another 50 were quarantined for 30 days while 37 people were given violation tickets and another 27 given warnings for failing to stop at an inspection station.

The board is pushing for inspections during daylight hours and legislation requiring out-of-province watercraft to report to an inspection centre before launching in local waters.

They also want the federal government to provide an additional \$4 million for continued education and prevention efforts.





Zebra and quagga mussels are identified as two of B.C.'s most "unwanted species"
Image Credit: Invasive Species Council of B.C.

Findlater admitted the prospect of keeping the damaging mussels out of the province and Okanagan Lake was daunting but pointed to successful efforts in some U.S. states as hope.

"So it can be done," he adds.

Monitoring at testing stations around the lake show the mussels have yet to appear in Okanagan Lake, Findlater says.

To that end, the board is trying to expand the Don't Move A Mussel message beyond the Okanagan where they say public awareness is already high.

They are asking Okanagan residents with friends and relatives in other provinces to engage them on the subject and ask they ensure their boats are clean when they come to B.C.

Findlater says its better to have the conversation before the boat shows up in the Okanagan.

The board has estimated the cost to the Okanagan at \$40 million a year, should the mussel become established here, and says it would devastate the local economy, by ruining local beaches and befouling piers, docks and water intakes.

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