



PENTICTON WESTERN NEWS



Free public forum on threat of invasive mussels

Hilo, one of Alberta's famous mussel-sniffing dogs, will be a highlight at forum

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The Okanagan and Similkameen Invasive Species Society is hosting a free public forum on the threat of invasive mussels to B.C.

The society said the arrival of zebra or quagga mussels in the Okanagan would have disastrous impacts to our pocket books, the tourism industry, water supply systems, fisheries and our overall enjoyment of boating and water-based recreation.

While the B.C. government recently announced significant new measures to address the threat of invasive mussels to B.C. waterways, the society wants the public to know exactly what is at stake and what is required to prevent these unwanted invaders from expanding into B.C.

Related: [New funding to fight invasive mussels](#)

Stephanie Hester co-ordinator of the Montana Invasive Species Council will

talk about the steps Montana is taking to prevent an economic and ecological disaster. The discovery of destructive invasive mussel larvae last year triggered a natural resource emergency in Montana and led to a massive statewide campaign now underway to manage the threat of invasive mussels spreading to other areas. In order to better prevent and contain invasive mussels, Montana's investment is increasing from \$1.2 million per year to more than \$5 million.

"The Continental Divide is the last line of defense against invasive mussels for the northwest. Montana has made its mussel response to detections in fall 2016 a priority at the highest level," said Hester.

One of B.C.'s key allies is Alberta, where they have employed mussel-sniffing dogs to aid their prevention efforts for the last two years. Cindy Sawchuk, dog handler with Alberta's Ministry of Environment and Parks, will be speaking about the importance of collaborative efforts and the Conservation K-9 Program in her province. She will be accompanied by Hilo, one of Alberta's famous mussel-sniffing dogs.



"The Alberta government works closely with our partners in British Columbia and the entire Pacific Northwest to take an active role in mussel prevention," said Sawchuk.

She adds that the key pieces of Alberta's work include mandatory watercraft inspections, introducing the first mussel-sniffing dogs nationally, actively monitoring waterbodies across the province and launching an annual educational awareness campaign targeting recreational watercraft owners.

For the past five years, OASISS has worked with private industry and local government agencies including the Okanagan Basin Water Board to educate residents and tourists about invasive mussels.

OASISS is hosting the free public forum on April 25 at Okanagan College in Penticton. Doors open at 6:45 p.m. with presentations beginning at 7:15 p.m.

For more information and to register for this event visit www.oasiss.ca

For more information on the mussels, risks to the Okanagan and prevention tips, visit www.DontMoveAMussel.ca.