

**CASTANET** NEWS Wednesday, Apr 26

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## Mussel sniffing dogs

Deborah Pfeiffer - Apr 16, 2017 / 5:00 am



Photo: Contributed

The Okanagan and Similkameen Invasive Species Society is hosting a free public forum on invasive mussels this month in Penticton

Among the speakers are Stephanie Hester, coordinator of the Montana Invasive Species Council, who 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

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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.

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.

According to organizers, invasive mussels are moving closer to B.C. every year.

The arrival of zebra or quagga mussels in the Okanagan would have disastrous impacts to residents' pocket books, the tourism industry, water supply systems, fisheries and 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, it's important that all residents truly understand what is at stake and what is required to prevent these unwanted invaders from expanding into B.C.

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.

The forum is April 25 at Okanagan College. 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](http://www.oasiss.ca)