

Prevent invasive species from gaining a toehold



By Kelowna Capital News

Published: **June 12, 2013 02:00 PM**

Updated: **June 12, 2013 02:442 PM**

Instead of plants poised to invade the Okanagan, this year during Invasive Species Week, the biggest concern regards a couple of aquatic molluscs which could cost the valley millions a year if they are allowed in.

Three different organizations are campaigning to prevent the spread of zebra and quagga mussels into B.C. waters, the Okanagan and Similkameen Invasive Species Society, the Okanagan Basin Water Board and the Invasive Species Council of B.C.

Kelowna Mayor Walter Gray is adamant that B.C. must treat this threat very seriously. "We absolutely must keep these mussels out of our system. We must do all that we can to protect our waters."

It's important to come up with a facility at all of B.C.'s borders to prevent vessels contaminated with either of the two species of mussel from entering B.C. waters without first being decontaminated, he said.

And, he feels every boat launch in the province needs a facility that includes a high pressure water system to wash boats down with a one per cent salt solution.

"They can hide everywhere, even between the boat and trailer," he noted.

"We can't wait until we have a problem before we fix this. We have to prevent it," he said.

Locally, the OBWB has launched its 'Don't Move a Mussel' campaign with ads and educational presentations, and a new website: www.dontmoveamussel.ca filled with information about the mussels and steps that must be taken to prevent an invasion, particularly by boaters.

Biologist Lisa Scott is coordinator of the OASISS and explains that these freshwater mussels rapidly colonize hard surfaces and can clog water intake structures, impact recreation and devastate local fisheries.

An invasion would be felt at the commercial and industrial level, as well as in the tourism sector and at the ecological level.

Direct costs and lost revenues are estimated at \$42 million a year in the Okanagan if the invasive mussels do gain a toehold.

If the microscopic-sized young get into the lake system, they will multiply rapidly.

Aquatic biologist Heather Larratt warns there's no question of being able to eradicate them once they're here.

Scott says, "Invasive species know no boundaries. They span landscapes, land ownerships and jurisdictions. Because of this, it's imperative that we work cooperatively to address the issue. We all need to take responsibility," she says.

Invasive species out-compete native species when introduced outside their natural environment, and away from their natural enemies.

She notes that the costs associated with invasive species in Canada are measured in the tens of billions of dollars and the costs are escalating.

Prevention is top priority, she said.

On land, there are concerns about such potential invasive plants as yellow starthistle, puncture vine and giant hogweed, as well as existing invasives such as the various knapweeds, baby's breath, loosestrife, dalmatian toadflax, sulphur cinquefoil, hound's tongue and burdock.

Kim Musfenden, bylaw enforcement officer with the Central Okanagan Regional District says they work to educate homeowners about such invasive plants, both by meeting face-to-face following complaints and by doing presentations about weeds of concern.

Methods of controlling such invasive plants is the main topic, including cutting and bagging and digging them out.

There are also bio-controls such as the knapweed root weevil which have been introduced into B.C. in the past couple of decades and which are now making their presence known, by stunting the growth of the devastating range weed.

For more information about invasives, go to the OASISS website at: www.oasiss.ca

jsteeves@kelownacapnews.com

Find this article at:

<http://www.kelownacapnews.com/news/211280851.html>