

CENTRAL OKANAGAN

Rototilling on Okanagan Lakes

by [Wayne Moore](#) - Story: 106218
Jan 9, 2014 / 12:07 pm



Photo: Trevor Rockliffe

Rooting around for roots on the lake bottom

You have probably noticed the large orange machines churning up gallons of water in front of and around Okanagan beaches the past several weeks.

These are milfoil rototillers, owned and operated by the Okanagan Basin Water Board.

The OBWB owns three of these of these machines.

One is in operation in the Gellatly Bay area of West Kelowna, one in front of Hot Sands Beach in City Park and the third is on Wood Lake.

Dave Caswell is the operator of the machine currently working in Gellatly Bay.

The machines were built by the OBWB and the province several decades ago They are purpose built aquatic plant rototillers which Caswell says do the same thing a farmer would do to his fields.

"It's got a rototiller on the backend that can be lowered down to the lake bottom. We drag the rototiller around and it literally chews up the bottom of the lake," says Caswell.

"That loosens up the roots of the plants that then float to the surface. They freeze and die in these cold winter temperatures."

According to Caswell this winter rototilling program is the only way to eradicate the Eurasian Milfoil.

"So we make a big mess in the winter and by summertime the lake has risen and fallen again and the beaches are nice and clean."

The program has been in place for more than 25 years.

Caswell says over that time the winter rototilling has made a big difference to the lake and beaches around the Okanagan.

He says before the program started the Eurasian Milfoil weed was so bad it was impossible for people to use some of the main public beaches on Okanagan lakes.

"Places like Kal Beach on Kalamalka Lake or like Kin Beach in Vernon - these were places where people weren't able to swim anymore. Unfortunately these weeds like to colonize in the same places we like to go and swim," says Caswell.

"What we have been able to over the years, especially with this winter rototilling program, is fight back the weeds and open up all the beaches to the point where people can come and spend their vacations in the Okanagan and never really notice a weed while they are here."

Despite best efforts, Caswell says the weed is such a vigorous grower it will never be totally eradicated from local waters.