



Invasive species costly to environment

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Invasive species are sadly not new to Okanagan-Coquihalla. Cattle Ranchers have battled with the loss of valuable grazing lands on account of invasive weeds as much as fruit growers and farmers know the frustration of crop loss as a result of the European Starling.

Swimmers and boaters are familiar with Eurasian milfoil not unlike local fisherman who are well aware of the damaged caused by the introduction of Mysis shrimp into the Okanagan Lake system. All of these invasive species have caused ecological harm and in some cases financial loss both directly and indirectly as different levels of government have funded strategies to control, reduce or eliminate these unwelcome invasive intrusions into our local ecosystem.

From my perspective being proactive and vigilant to guard against future threats of invasive species is important. Recently the Okanagan Basin Water Board has undertaken a campaign to warn citizens and senior levels of government on the important need to take action against another invasive species: freshwater mussels. First I would like to commend the Okanagan Basin Water Board for the work they have done in bringing this matter forward. From the limited research I have undertaken there is indeed a potential serious threat to many of our valued freshwater lakes in Okanagan-Coquihalla and elsewhere.

Aside from the potential environmental harm, of particular concern is the fact that many citizens in our region depend upon safe, reliable drinking water that is drawn from the Okanagan Lake water system. Freshwater mussels are well known to clog intake pipes that in turn can cause considerable damage to pumps and filtration systems. Currently many of our water purveyors are already struggling to meet increased Interior Health water regulation standards and the added impact of damage to water infrastructure could be in the range of tens of millions of dollars along with the potential inconvenience of suspension of water service while repairs are undertaken. In short, an unacceptable situation.

Ultimately invasive mussels are most likely to be spread by a contaminated boat or trailer from another region most likely originating either from outside of Canada or from eastern Canada. Fortunately boats transported from eastern Canada will most likely be out of the water for five days

(given the distance) that is considered sufficient time that a mussel cannot survive out of water. Thus the largest threat in our region would be from boats south of the border where there are currently freshwater lakes contaminated with invasive mussels. It is critically important to intercept a contaminated boat and trailer on land before it enters a freshwater lake, thus enhanced enforcement at Canadian border crossings is an obvious measure to prevent the spread of freshwater mussels. As a secondary consideration, the integrated roadside enforcement unit that currently patrol BC roads may stop a boat and trailer for safety defects could potentially have an expanded role to inspect for invasive mussel growth. Additionally the same may apply to local Conservation officers who frequently patrol lakes and boat launches looking for fishing violations could be another consideration.

Obviously these potential solutions involve joint Federal and Provincial Government collaboration and likewise local government could work with marinas, yacht clubs and other boat launching areas with an education campaign. At the moment regulation around invasive species such as freshwater mussels is already under review and I plan on meeting with several Ministers in Ottawa to expedite greater vigilance at border crossings – more so now as the 2014 boating season has yet to begin. The intent of this report is to provide an update on what I believe is an important issue and the efforts underway to help mitigate them. As always I welcome your comments on this or any concern; my email address is dan.albas@parl.gc.ca or alternately I can be reached via phone at 1 (800) 665-8711.

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