

NEWS

Invasive mussels stopped from entering the Okanagan

by [Richard Rolke - Vernon Morning Star](#)

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The Okanagan escaped a close call with an invasive species that has devastated ecosystems across North America.

On March 12, a Canada Customs official at the Osoyoos border crossing stopped a vehicle pulling a boat from Texas. It was headed for moorage in Okanagan Lake and it was infested with what was believed to be zebra or quagga mussels.

“It’s because of the awareness raised by the Okanagan Basin Water Board that the customs officer acted,” said Juliette Cunningham, an OBWB director.

The federal customs officer had no legislative authority to refuse entry to the vehicle, but the truck driver co-operated and B.C. conservation officers were contacted. A decontamination unit was sent to the scene.

The mussels are native to Europe but were introduced to North America and since then, they have spread across the continent, clogging water intake pipes, pumps and boat motors. They also deplete food sources for fish and produce toxins that kill fish and birds and contaminate drinking water.

There is also a recreational impact as the razor-sharp shells can spread across beaches.

The OBWB has suggested it could cost \$43 million a year to manage the mussels if they arrive in the valley.

Because of the potential risk, OBWB has been lobbying the federal government to permit border guards to inspect boats and prohibit entry of any contaminated vessels. It also wants the provincial government to create an inspection program.

A report suggests that 19 per cent of the infected boats stopped in Idaho in the last five years were on their way to B.C. and Alberta