



A milfoil harvester will be used to control an outbreak of the weed in Osoyoos Lake. (File Photo: Wayne Moore - Castanet)

Milfoil outbreak in Osoyoos Lake

*by Contributed - Story: 56024
Jul 30, 2010 / 5:00 pm*

A massive milfoil outbreak in Osoyoos Lake has prompted quick action from the Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB.)

The OBWB has put its Eurasian Watermilfoil Control Program into high gear at the north end of Osoyoos Lake this summer, looking to get ahead of the weed this season.

“We used to see massive weed beds like this 20 to 30 years ago, but I haven’t seen milfoil growth this early, or to this extent, since that time,” says Eurasian Watermilfoil field supervisor Ian Horner.

In response to the outbreak the Water Board has trained an additional operator with milfoil control experience on Christina Lake to run a harvester – a type of floating lawn-mower - says Horner.

The control operation is now running seven days a week.

Low lake level this past winter and the warm early spring followed by heavy rains which likely washed nutrients into the lake are factors contributing to the outbreak, says Horner.

The best method to control milfoil is rototilling, derooting the aquatic plant, in fall and winter, says Horner.

However, Osoyoos Lake has a naturally limited rototilling season based on its water levels, and a smaller window of

opportunity than in other parts of the Okanagan Valley.

There are also limited sites available to launch the control machines.

“It’s just a weed, but a large part of the Okanagan economy depends on tourism and we like our pristine lakes,” says Horner, adding the milfoil control team should have the plant under control by summer’s end.

According to Osoyoos Mayor and OBWB chair, Stu Wells, this summer’s milfoil outbreak points to the importance of the Northwest Sewer Project.

Residential sewage leeching into groundwater and finding its way into Osoyoos Lake has been a long-standing concern.

“That whole northwest area is moving from septic to sewer thanks to the OBWB, which is helping fund the project over the next 20 years,” says Wells.

The six phase project, currently at the end of Phase 1, is set to be finished by March 31, 2012.

“When the work is all done, nutrient loading will be vastly improved. Nitrogen and phosphorous levels in the water will be eliminated, which will certainly address our milfoil situation,” says Wells.

While the OBWB’s weed control program only extends to Milfoil, it isn’t the only lake plant in Osoyoos.

Operators have also seen brown algae and the native potamogeton pond weed.

In general, native aquatic plants are fish-friendly.

Eurasian milfoil, however, is invasive, non-native and a nuisance for swimmers and boaters.

Control of the milfoil on public beaches and boating areas are given top priority.

Link: Okanagan Basin Water Board