

news

Milfoil control measures in high gear on lake

Aggressive rototilling can continue until lake freezes

By Tasleem Mawji
Osoyoos Times

For nearly a month-and-a-half, Eurasian watermilfoil has been rototilled for 10 hours a day on an almost daily basis in the north end of Osoyoos Lake to avoid the plant growth seen last summer.

“Why it got so bad last year was because when the lake freezes over, we don’t get our time on the lake for the winter rototilling program,” said Osoyoos Mayor Stu Wells, who is also the chair of the Okanagan Basin Water Board.

The board is responsible for milfoil control efforts in the lake.

“This year we’re extremely pleased with the length of the season that we’re having on Osoyoos Lake and we should be able to get that whole north area and some other areas back under control,” Wells said.

Eurasian watermilfoil was introduced to North America in the 19th century and is an aggressive plant that interferes with recreational activities like boating, swimming and fishing by forming thick underwater stands and dense mats on the surface of the water.

It is also an invasive species that can nega-



Dave Caswell, the Okanagan Basin Water Board’s milfoil control operator, was on the lake on Dec. 23. He said the ice near the shore was thin enough to break up and that he had not had a problem accessing the shore of the lake while rototilling.

Photo by Tasleem Mawji

tively impact fish and wildlife by decreasing oxygen, nutrients, light flow and water flow in the lake.

Milfoil can also displace native aquatic vegetation within a couple of years if left unattended.

The board has had a Milfoil Control Program since the 1970s and reported last summer as the worst growth experienced in the lake in the last 20 to 30 years.

The board will also rototill the southeast portion of the lake near the bridge this winter as well as public and private beaches along Lakeshore Drive.

Work will continue until too much of the lake is frozen over to continue the rototilling.

The rototiller pulls the weed out from its root and, because milfoil needs warmth to regenerate, the plant fragments will decompose in the cold weather.

In the spring, the plant

is harvested or mowed at about 1.8 metres below the surface.

The milfoil is then removed from the water as any milfoil left behind will grow into new plant beds in warmer water.

Other reasons for last year’s outbreak were the low water levels in the winter and the warm, early spring followed by heavy rains, which likely washed nutrients into the lake, according to a press release put out by the board last summer.

Raw sewage or nutrients leaching from septic tanks was also blamed for last summer’s growth.

Wells said this issue speaks to the need of the Northwest Sector Sewer Project, which will put many homes onto the Town’s sewer system.

The board has three rototillers and one shallow water crawler and also provides milfoil control in other lakes in the Okanagan Valley.

Corrine Jackson, a spokeswoman for the

the Town by either using the milfoil for compost or cleaning up the area in front of their homes, as the municipality cannot afford the cost of raking the entire beach.

The time for har-

vesting in the spring will depend on the B.C. Environment Ministry’s data on fish spawning in the area as well as when the milfoil reaches the surface of the water.

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