

# Mussel could stop weed control

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If a little mollusc that is native to the Okanagan is declared endangered by the federal government, the Okanagan Basin Water Board's program of harvesting the non-native invasive Eurasian water milfoil could be put at risk.

The Rocky Mountain Ridged Mussel is under consideration by the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans for listing under the Species At Risk Act as endangered because populations have declined in recent years.

At Tuesday's monthly meeting of the OBWB, executive director Anna Warwick Sears reported that little is known about the biology of the mussel and substantial commitments would be needed from senior government to address primary threats to the species.

For instance, she noted that the invasive zebra and quagga mussels are threatening the Okanagan's system of lakes, and they would present a significant threat to the native mussel, as does other foreshore disturbances.

She said she is appalled at the federal government even considering the designation when they haven't even decided to set aside the money to come up with a plan of how to protect the mussel.

"There are more flexible ways to help prevent their extinction," she said.

Board chairman Stu Wells said if milfoil is not rototilled at the north end of Osoyoos Lake, that end of the lake would be choked out.

The board agreed to send a letter to relevant senior government departments with its concerns regarding the impact such a declaration could have on milfoil control and tourism if a SARA designation is made.

The letter will also suggest that funding be made available instead to study the mussel and determine the cause of its decline in population.

The Okanagan is the only location RMRM occurs in Canada, noted Sears, who said she is normally in favour of listing species that are at risk.

However, in this case, she said, there is simply not enough information available to be sure this is the best route to take.

Uncontrolled growth of the milfoil could also pose a risk to survival of this species of mussel, she added.

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