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[Public Hearing Tonight →](#)

5-year go-ahead is an important step – Osoyoos Mayor Stu Wells

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Working with the Province of B.C., the Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) has been given a five-year agreement for milfoil control on Okanagan Lakes, ensuring improved work flow for the program.

The OBWB has been responsible for control of invasive Eurasian watermilfoil in Okanagan valley lakes since the 1970s. In recent years, new environmental and species concerns have increased the amount of diligence needed to operate.

This year, the OBWB worked with provincial staff to develop a new operation plan and comprehensive mapping for the 53 km of shoreline that is treated through this program. The new system means operations will be able to continue through summer 2018 without the need to notify the province. “In the past we’ve had to notify the province twice a year, even though our operations have been relatively consistent for decades,” explained James Littley, OBWB Office and Project Manager. “This year we were able to collaborate with provincial staff to develop best practices that will let us control the weeds, and protect the lakes’ sensitive species and ecosystems.”

Milfoil grows in water up to 6 meters deep (about 19.5 feet) and can grow 5 cm (almost 2 inches) per day, forming thick mats on the surface of the water. Dense growth can adversely affect water quality and species habitat, and can ruin recreational opportunities on beaches and in boating areas. It can have a negative effect on tourism and can even

lower property values.

“The 5-year go-ahead is an important step for this program,” said a pleased OBWB Chair and Mayor of Osoyoos Stu Wells. “These weeds take over swimming areas, get tangled in boat motors and make a mess of our lakes. With the new plan, we should be able to knock down some of the density, and make our lakes even better.”

Due to the rigorous process required for a 5-year permit, the program’s summer harvesting was delayed by about two weeks this year, starting in Osoyoos and Wood Lakes on July 16th, rather than July 2nd. “This year we’re a little behind where we would like to be, but our operators are working longer shifts and more days to make up for lost time,” added Littlely. “In the long-term though, this plan will allow us more flexibility and allow us to make greater headway in reducing the density in really troubled areas.”