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Close call on mussels

by Jon Manchester | Story: 146108 - Aug 17, 2015 / 12:48 pm

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Photo: Jon Manchester

A powerful reminder about stopping the spread of invasive mussels was driven home, Monday.

As Ministry of Environment staff trained local marina and yacht club operators at the Cook Road boat

AS MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT STAFF TRAINED LOCAL MARINA AND YACHT CLUB OPERATORS AT THE COOK ROAD BOAT LAUNCH IN KELOWNA, A BOAT THAT HAD BEEN FLAGGED AS CARRYING THE INVASIVE SHELLFISH REPORTED FOR INSPECTION.

Richard Gratton of Ottawa purchased his 27-foot, twin-engine Thompson cabin cruiser three months ago. He put in the Rideau Canal for about two months before bringing it to British Columbia.

On his way, he pulled into an inspection station at the Alberta-saskatchewan border where sniffer dogs and inspection teams discovered the mussels on his boat.

"It was a surprise to me," he said. "I couldn't tell, they were so small," said Gratton.

"I'd done an inspection on the boat before we left, but they were in tight little areas that you couldn't tell they were even mussels."

Gratton said he's done his best to co-operate with the boat's decontamination.

"Obviously, we love the water," he said.

His presence added a serious tone to the free training workshop going on at the boat launch. It was organized by the Okanagan Basin Water Board and manned by Ministry of Environment staff.

Gratton had been asked to report for a secondary inspection in B.C. before placing his boat back in the water.

More mussels were found, but they were deemed non-viable.

In Alberta, the tiny mussels were found on the boat's trim tabs and inside a drain pipe.

Brandon Beck and Elysse Mathews, with invasive species management, said they would be bringing the boat to a more secure location away from the water and other boats, where Gratton's vessel would be powerwashed and re-inspected.

The boat never was in Okanagan Lake. Gratton is headed to the Lower Mainland and plans to moor it on the Fraser River.

"It's been an interesting process," he said. "In the end, we just want to make sure everybody's happy and the vessel is safe."

Possession of zebra or quagga mussels, dead or alive, is prohibited by both provincial and federal law.

The invasive species originate from Eastern Europe and were introduced into the Great Lakes in the 1980s after a European vessel released ballast water carrying the mollusks. Since then, the mussels have been hitchhiking through Canada and the U.S. on boats and other watercraft.

B.C. is among only a few provinces and U.S. states that are still considered mussel-free, including Alberta, Saskatchewan, Washington, Idaho, Montana, Oregon and Wyoming.

Currently, there is no known way to eliminate the mussels once they enter a water body. And with each female able to produce one million eggs a year, it wouldn't take long for the mussels to get established in the Okanagan.

These mussels can clog boat motors, foul beaches and put water quality, fisheries and tourism at risk. Research conducted for the water board estimates the cost to the Okanagan if the mussels were to

gain a foothold would be \$43 million a year.

For more on the mussels, visit www.DontMoveAMussel.ca.



Photo: Jon Manchester