

Kelowna NEWS

Mussel invasion costly

by [Wayne Moore](#) | Story: 147192 - Sep 4, 2015 / 4:04 pm



Photo: Wayne Moore - Castanet

By now, we've heard the horror stories about what an infestation of quagga or zebra mussels could mean in Okanagan Lake.

From the cost of repairing and replacing lake infrastructure to environmental repercussions, the yearly cost would be in the millions of dollars.

Julia Lew with the Southern Nevada Water Authority brought her knowledge of the mussel's impact to the Okanagan Basin Water Board's annual meeting, Friday.

Lew spoke of the impact quagga mussels have had on Nevada's Lake Mead.

The lake, created by Hoover Dam in 1935, is the water source for 20 million people in Nevada, California and Arizona.

Along with suffering a loss in water, the lake was also infested with the quagga mussel in early 2007.

"We assume the infestation in Lake Mead happened either from a houseboat that came from the Great Lakes or from a boating event that happened where boats were coming from nearby lakes," said Lew.

Lew said it's hard for her to quantify all the damage done by the mussel, but said the impact on her utility has been dramatic.

"It's impacted us in water treatment quite a bit. We've had to adapt our treatment strategies with our pre-treatment, which affects our finished water quality," said Lew.

"We are still in the process of building our third new intake that has had a costly impact for our treatment plants."

The annual cost to the water authority is about \$200,000. But, Lew said, that doesn't include additional construction costs for chemical structures that are upwards of \$8 million.

The impact has also been felt by the Department of Wildlife, National Parks Service as well as power utilities and tourism.

The problem, unfortunately, will never go away.

"There's no way they will ever disappear," said Lew, who added only a few lakes have successfully been cleared of the mussels.

"There is one documented case in Texas where they eradicated mussels in a much smaller lake than Lake Mead," she said.

Lew said it's incumbent on government to ensure programs are in place to keep the mussels out of B.C.

"That has been the biggest hurdle for Lake Mead, the lack of enforcement.

"Any program trying to control the spread of invasive species is not effective if there is no enforcement."

The province, BC Hydro and Columbia Basin Trust spent nearly \$1.7 million this year on inspection programs.

A total of 26 boats were found that required decontamination. Four of them required a 30-day quarantine.