

West Kelowna NEWS

Mussel defence improves

Jennifer Zielinski - Mar 30, 2016 / 6:10 pm



They haven't been found in the water, but they are no stranger to B.C.

Invasive mussels have been discovered in the province, but have fortunately been prevented from entering any waterway.

With boating season right around the corner and a successful pilot program under the government's belt, Premier Christy Clark announced a \$2 million boost to the invasive mussel defence program that will see eight permanent mussel inspection stations installed at major entry points along B.C.'s borders.

She made the announcement in West Kelowna on Wednesday, saying funding was provided in partnership by BC Hydro, FortisBC, Columbia Power and the Columbia Basin Trust.

"Most people here know that invasive mussels pose a tremendous threat to our economy, our tourist economy, environment and lakes we depend on," she said.

The government says the threat of invasive mussels could cost the province \$43 million a year.

Quagga and zebra mussels pose a serious threat to B.C.'s aquatic ecosystems, salmon populations, hydro power stations and other infrastructure facilities. They can clog pipes, cause ecological and economic damage, displace native aquatic plants and wildlife, degrade the environment and affect drinking water quality.

Five inspection stations will be set up along the B.C.-Alberta border, and three along the B.C.-United States border. These stations will begin operation April 1 and continue until October.

The funding will also help with more coverage during peak travel times where the number of conservation officers will be increase from the current 12 to 32.

“They will be stationed at each site seven days a week, 10 hours a day,” said Clark. “They are going to be able to identify and quarantine several different kinds of invasive species. They are going to be looking at milfoil and flora species as well but they focusing particular on invasive mussels.”

An additional six mobile decontamination units are being added to the fleet of equipment.

The eight inspection stations will have the capability to become mobile if the need arises, travelling to locations throughout B.C. where watercrafts are being detained, waiting for decontamination.

Chair of the Okanagan Basin Water Board Doug Findlater sees the announcement as welcome news as he’s spent the last several years fighting to increase BC’s inspection regime.

“With the number of locations and the number of personnel, the data collection is going to be vastly improved. It isn’t going to be hit and miss as we have had. We are going to be able to get some very solid data.”

The Invasive Mussel Defence pilot program was launched in 2015. During May to October 2015, over 4,300 boats were inspected, of which 70 were identified as coming from an invasive mussel infested province or state.

Out of these 70 watercrafts, 34 required decontamination and 15 were confirmed to be transporting invasive mussels or their larvae. Six were issued a 30-day quarantine order due to risk of live mussels.



Photo: Contributed

Video link: <http://www.castanet.net/news/West-Kelowna/162012/Mussel-defence-improves>