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Rising lake shuts down spring milfoil control early

By staff1 on May 15, 2018

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The Okanagan Basin Water Board has three rototiller machines, but one is dedicated entirely to Osoyoos Lake, which has the worst milfoil problem. It runs from October to April with the exception of a period when the ice is too thick.

The milfoil control spring program came to an early finish last week because of rising lake levels.

James Littley, who oversees the program for the Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB), said the decision was made last Wednesday after evaluating the situation the previous day.

The rototiller, which pulls milfoil up by the roots, will not return to the water this season even after the flooding abates, he said.

This program normally runs in the spring when colder water temperatures make the invasive aquatic weed dormant.

A summer program, which usually gets underway in July, only cuts the tops off the milfoil to clear the water for swimmers and boaters. When the water is warmer, the milfoil is growing and uprooting it can cause it to spread.

Littley said the decision to stop was made because of concerns about the wake the boat makes and the potential for damaging property.

The rototiller was operating in the north basin at the time the program was halted.

"We have been in the north end for a few weeks now and we had a few days left in the north end, but we just decided today that we have to pull it out," he said last Wednesday.

Littley added that OBWB couldn't complete work in the south basin this year. With high water under the bridge and with boat launches closed, it became difficult to move the machine.

Had the work not been interrupted, OBWB would have spent another week or two on Osoyoos Lake, Littley said. If the boat had been able to get to the south basin, there was another week of work to do there, he added.

"We weren't able to get into Solana Bay, and there's a restriction that we can't go in there until after April 1, but we actually had to leave the south before that because the lake had already started to rise, so we couldn't get under the bridge," he said.

Meanwhile, Littley added that the milfoil machine operator, Monique Stone, opted to stay for a while in Osoyoos to help with sandbagging.

RICHARD McGUIRE

Osoyoos Times

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