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Okanagan company the first to privately tackle milfoil removal

Steve Arstad



In some lakes milfoil grows so fast some property owners need to cut it up to four times each season.

Image Credit: SUBMITTED

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PENTICTON - Private enterprise has taken up the quest to rid Okanagan lakes of a pesky invasive species.

Trueshore Aquatic Milfoil Harvesting Services is picking up where government-sponsored milfoil harvesting leaves off, by making their services available to private landowners.

Lia Harris, one of five co-owners of the Osoyoos based company, says she believes it's the first and only private milfoil harvester in the valley.

The company is in its first year, and has just completed an onerous permitting process to allow them to work on Osoyoos Lake. Harris hopes they can prove themselves and find easier access to permitting that will ultimately allow them to work on other lakes up and down the valley.

"It's been a big undertaking. We definitely want to expand if there is demand, maybe next season," she says, adding the company has received inquiries from other lakes. The company is also finding as word gets around business is increasing, with a waiting list already started for next year's customers.

Harris says the company's expansion plans are very dependent on the province, who have a lengthy process to go through before a licence to harvest milfoil is granted.

"Right now, we need permits from every property owner who hires us. They sign forms, which go to an engineering consulting firm who do mapping and environmental studies before the province reviews it and grants an approval, for every single property we do," she says.

Harris says they hope to be able to prove themselves responsible and capable of following regulations, the end result being granted a blanket permit such as that issued to the Okanagan Basin Water Board, which harvests milfoil in problem public areas of the valley's lakes.



Harris says because the company cuts milfoil, and isn't rototilling or working the lake bottom it isn't subject to harvesting restrictions due to the endangered Rocky Mountain ridged mussel.

The company can take the cuttings away or leave them to the property owner to use as fertilizer.

Milfoil harvesting restrictions have begun escalating in the valley because of recent changes to provincial regulation, mainly those surrounding protection of the Rocky Ridge mussel.

Milfoil was introduced to Okanagan Lake in 1970 and since then has spread to most other lakes in the valley.

It spreads by fragmentation, making it subject to rapid growth along shorelines where it fouls boat propellers, makes swimming uncomfortable and even dangerous, and snags on fishing hooks.

It can even threaten fish if it becomes so dense they won't swim in it.

Ultimately, it can reduce waterfront property values, and chase tourists away.

The water board currently provides milfoil service on Okanagan lakes, but prioritizes public areas.

"We're hoping to fill the void left by OBWB's program. They can't be everywhere," Harris says.

For more information on Trueshore Aquatic Milfoil Harvesting Services, call 250-495-2384, or [visit their website](#).



Trueshore Aquatic Milfoil Harvesting Services is the first privately funded milfoil cutting service in the Okanagan.

Image Credit: SUBMITTED

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