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## Relieve for our beaches?

Colin Dacre - Aug 15, 2019 / 6:00 pm



Photo: OBWB  
A rototiller on Okanagan Lake

The Okanagan Basin Water Board is cheering a decision that has delayed reclassifying a threatened mussel found in the Okanagan as endangered.

The federal Ministry of Fisheries announced Thursday more study is needed before the Rocky Mountain Ridged Mussel can be reclassified under the *Species at Risk Act*.

The water board is now renewing its calls to allow the rototilling of invasive milfoil weeds at public beaches and boating areas.

"We are very pleased with this decision. It allows more flexibility for us to manage invasive milfoil, keep the beaches clean, and protect water quality" said Anna Warwick Sears, executive director of the OBWB.

"Milfoil degrades the environment for all species, as well as the public's access to the lake. Now we just need the province to renew our permit to operate in our historical treatment areas. We understand that this is within the discretion of the B.C. Minister of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development."

For years the board's rototillers have avoided areas where the Rocky Mountain ridged mussel — listed as a "special concern" under the federal Species at Risk Act — had been found. The mussel is native to the Okanagan and is found nowhere else in Canada.

Earlier this year the list of beaches in the Okanagan where the mussel has been spotted grew substantially to include several high-public use areas that are traditionally rototilled. Those include Kin and Paddlewheel Park Beaches in Vernon, Crescent and Rotary Beaches in Summerland, both ends of Skaha Lake and Haynes Point in Osoyoos.

Had the mussel been reclassified as "endangered" by the federal government, it may have completely ended rototilling.

The OBWB says a 2015 study that found healthy populations in the Okanagan River channel was never considered in the proposal to list the species as endangered. The group maintains there is no evidence the mussel can survive in dense milfoil beds.

"As the OBWB correctly pointed out there were simply far too many unanswered questions and lack of recent data to risk the unintended impacts of the reclassification of the Rocky Mountain Ridged Mussel," said Kelowna-Lake Country MP Stephen Fuhr, adding milfoil has the ability to "wreak havoc in our beautiful local lakes."

The OBWB is asking for the federal government to conduct an economic analysis on how the listing would impact milfoil growth, water quality, beach access, tourism and the Okanagan economy. It is also requesting a permanent exemption from the province for milfoil control, a program that's been in place for three decades, as well as a full public consultation process on the listing of the mussel.

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