

## Mussels found on watercraft

OBWB report said 19 watercraft had invasive mussels on them

Darren Handschuh - Nov 13, 2019 / 11:57 am



Photo: File photo

A report report said 19 boats heading to BC had invasive mussels on them.

Watercraft inspection stations found 19 watercraft heading to BC waters were carrying invasive zebra or quagga mussels.

A report from the Okanagan Basin Water Board said between late April and Sept. 15, the province conducted more than 50,000 inspections. Of these, 1,240 watercraft were considered high risk.

Those 19 were travelling from Ontario (14), Michigan (2), Utah (2) and North Carolina (1) and were headed for the Lower Mainland (8), Vancouver Island (4), Okanagan (3), the Kootenays (2), Skeena (1) and Alaska (1).

The seasonal program ended in October and final numbers are expected soon.

North Okanagan-Shuswap MP Mel Arnold has championed the need for more checkpoints to keep the invasive species out of BC waterways.

While there is no evidence invasive species are in the Okanagan, Arnold said finding watercraft with the mussels shows the federal government must be vigilant in its efforts to keep the mussels out.

"I certainly think more needs to be done, that's why I have been pressuring the government and the fisheries minister to take some action on this," said Arnold.

Arnold said the federal government has allotted \$53.8 million for aquatic invasive species (AIS), but only 1.6 per cent of that is destined for BC.

"That's a really small amount for what's needed," he said, adding a report last years had nine recommendations for preventing AIS from getting into the province.

"One of the responses from the government was that the Great Lakes is a priority ecosystem, but I would counter that by saying 'why isn't the Okanagan and Shuswap systems a priority as well?'" said Arnold who was re-elected on October.

Arnold referenced the return of sockeye salmon to Okanagan Lake for the first time in decades and how AIS would destroy the spawning habitat of those fish.

"Once they are here, there is no way of getting rid of them," said Arnold.