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A cooler summer last year might benefit Okanagan lakes this year

Rob Munro



(ADAM PROSKIW / iNFOnews.ca)

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The cool, damp summer of 2019 may not have been great for Okanagan beachgoers but it had one very bright silver lining – milfoil didn't like it either.

As crews from the Okanagan Basin Water Board rototilled the waters of five Valley lakes over the past few months they found the milfoil growths were much thinner than in recent years.

"It's not scientific, but operators have been doing this for quite a long of time," James Littlely, the board's operations and grants manager, told iNFOnews.ca. "In general, if it's a cool, wet, cloudy kind of summer there's less light penetration. And then, of course, the rain stirs up some of the sediment and increases the creek flows which, again, creates cloudy water reducing the light penetration."

While that can make it easier to rototill the milfoil crop over the winter, smaller growth can sometimes make it harder for operators to see the fragments of the weed on the lake bottom. Those small pieces are how the weed regenerates. That may mean, if some are missed, small patches can sprout up.

But, especially in beach areas that are rototilled for two or three consecutive years, there can be an almost 100 per cent eradication of the weed for the following summer.



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Another good weather effect this year has been a relatively mild winter, despite the bitter cold week or so in January.

Normally crews start working in October and focus on the smaller Okanagan lakes, taking their machines out of places like Duck and Osoyoos Lakes just before they freeze. But, this year, they were out of those lakes for only a couple of weeks.

"For us, that's really huge," Littlely said.

Crews are not always able to get to all areas every winter but, having a lighter crop of milfoil means they will be able to rototill more of the lakes before the season ends.