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Monday, May 30, 2022

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Costly new vessels eyed to attack water weeds in the Okanagan

RON SEYMOUR Apr 29, 2022 Updated May 9, 2022



Rototillers and harvesters used to control Eurasian milfoil, a slimy water weed, in the Okanagan are decades old and will need replacing soon, water managers say.

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Aging machines used to control weeds in Okanagan lakes must be replaced in the coming years, water managers will hear next week.

Some of the harvesters and roto-tillers are already a decade past their expected lifespan, according to the Okanagan Basin Water Board, which runs the control program.

Two new harvesters expected to be put into service next year will cost \$250,000 apiece, while replacing one 32-year-old rototiller could cost \$600,000.

"Due to efficient and dedicated maintenance, our machines have far surpassed the useful lifespans listed by the B.C. Ministry of Finance, with the average age of OBWB assets being 27.5 years," reads part of a staff report to OBWB directors, made up of the local politicians from across the Valley.

Milfoil is controlled along 50 km of shoreline in the Okanagan. Rototiller yanks the invasive weed out by the roots in the winter, and harvesters trim the tops of the plants in the summer.

Beaches and other high-use areas get the most attention, with the lowest priority given to waters off private properties, the report states.

The milfoil control program was established in the early 1970s and the provincial government paid most of the costs through to the mid-90s. But provincial support ended in 1999, and Okanagan property owners now cover the program's roughly \$800,000 annual expense through taxation.

Reserves built up over time will help fund the purchase of the replacement equipment.

A recent analysis of the weed control methods done by UBCO engineering students has suggested a new machine that combines an industrial shredder, hydraulic press, and de-watering barge that could increase total harvesting amounts by as much as 10 times, OBWB operations and grants manager James Littlely says.

Further discussions between OBWB staff and UBCO civil engineering professor Nicolas Peleato are underway to refine plans for the new machine.

- This story corrects an earlier version that said the proposed new machine could increase harvesting amounts by 10 percent.

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