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Vernon

MILFOIL MACHINES TOO OLD

Okanagan milfoil harvesters are almost 45 years old and badly need replacing

Jon Manchester - May 2, 2022 / 12:51 pm



Photo: OBWB

The Okanagan Basin Water Board says it will need two new lake weed harvesters in the next year, at a cost of \$250,000 each.

By then, the milfoil harvesters will be 45 years old.

"The current harvesters were both manufactured in 1978 and have surpassed their expected lifespan of 35 years," a report to the Okanagan Basin Water Board states.

The board will consider the request at its meeting on Tuesday.

The aquatic weed harvesters are floating, paddlewheel-driven barges with a conveyor that can be lowered approximately two metres into the water, where blades at the front edge and sides cut milfoil below the water.

Once cut, the conveyor lifts the weeds into the belly of the machine.

Meanwhile, the board says winter de-rooting is currently still underway in Wood Lake, Osoyoos Lake, and Okanagan Lake in Kelowna.

"While we had significant scheduling setbacks this winter primarily due to low lake levels, we have been able to de-root in most of the high-priority areas throughout the valley. Most of the de-rooting work will be complete by May 1," the report states.

The milfoil control program treats more than 50 kilometres of shoreline in the Okanagan.

The program uses aquatic rototillers to de-root the plant during the winter, and the harvesters to cut and remove plant material during the summer.

The original milfoil control program was established in 1973 as a partnership between the B.C. Ministry of Environment and the water board. In 1999, the province cancelled its participation in the program and since then, all costs have been borne solely by the OBWB.

Property owners in the Okanagan pay into the milfoil control program, which prioritizes treatment for public beaches.

Areas adjacent to private property have typically been treated, free of charge, as a courtesy and as time allowed.

However, shoreline development near urban areas has limited access while also increasing calls for attention.

"This has reduced access to sites which we have historically used for the program. We also face a risk from the unknown effects of climate change, and its implications for milfoil growth, and the effectiveness of our treatments," the report adds.