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DON'T MOVE A MUSSEL

Campaign to keep invasive mussels out of local lakes continues

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Photo: contibuted-OBWB-OkWaterWise

Once again, the Okanagan Basin Water Board and its Okanagan WaterWise program are asking valley residents to not move a mussel.

But this time it has an added request — help spread the message to those visiting the Okanagan this summer.

"We have a paradise here, but in the last few years we go through the same routine each summer with invasive mussel-infested watercraft being intercepted on their way to the Okanagan," says Corinne Jackson, communications director for the OBWB. "We really need to be watchful."

This year, the water board is appealing to valley residents to talk with their out-of-town families and guests, who are bringing watercraft with them to the Okanagan, about helping protect local waterways and keeping destructive invasive quagga and zebra mussels out. They are asked to encourage visitors to stop at all inspection stations along their travel route and then following the "clean, drain, dry" protocol when leaving the water.

Zebra and quagga mussels originate from freshwater lakes in Russia and Ukraine. Outside their natural habitat, and with few predators, they outcompete native species, encrust and corrode hard surfaces, and cause serious harm to waters where they become established.

Since 2013, the water board has mounted its annual "Don't Move A Mussel" campaign to protect Okanagan lakes and waterways, helping prevent them from falling victim to the mussels that have badly damaged lakes in Manitoba, Ontario and Quebec and several U.S. states. In these cases, for example at Lake Winnipeg, beaches are now not walkable in bare feet because of infestations of the mussels with razor-sharp shells.



Photo: OBWB-OkWaterWise

And it is not just beaches and tourism that could be adversely impacted. Fish stocks, drinking water quality, in-water infrastructure, property values and the overall economy could also be hit hard by a zebra or quagga mussel infestation. They also clog up infrastructure. It is estimated that if the mussels were to be introduced in the Okanagan, the annual bill just to deal with the damage would be in excess of \$42 million per year.

The mussels reproduce very quickly. One female can produce a million eggs. They can also live for up to 30 days out of the water in damp spaces.

"We all have something to lose if the mussels come into our lakes and waterbodies," says Jackson.

With summer heating up and Canadians and Americans coming off long pandemic shutdowns that kept many home, there is a pent-up desire to get out and enjoy what people have been missing. And that includes an increase in visitors from across Canada and the U.S. bringing watercraft – including many purchased in the last couple years – to enjoy on B.C. lakes, including some that may be carrying the minute mussels on board. Zebra and quagga mussels at their smallest are the size of a grain of sand and at their largest, only the size of a thumbnail.

Inspection stations (see map below) are in place along the B.C.-Alberta border and if you are transporting any type of watercraft in B.C. (boat, kayak, paddle board, etc.) it is mandatory to stop and report to all inspection stations along your route. Failing to stop at a B.C. inspection station can result in a \$345 fine. Those hauling watercraft outside of inspection hours should call the 1-800 inspection hotline at 1-877-952-7277 (RAPP).

The water board has continued to press the province and the federal government to do more to protect B.C. water bodies from the invasive mussels. The Okanagan is deemed at high risk because of its warm water temperatures and calcium-rich waters. Tourism adds an additional risk, says Jackson, so that is why the public is being asked to spread the word to their visitors.

Those purchasing out-of-province watercraft also need to be vigilant and contact [COS.Aquatic.Invasive.Species@gov.bc.ca](mailto:COS.Aquatic.Invasive.Species@gov.bc.ca) to determine if their boat is high-risk and should be decontaminated before launching in B.C. waters.

In addition to the public awareness and media campaign – using digital ads, social media, billboards, radio ads and a contest, OBWB's Okanagan WaterWise program is also working with water recreation-related businesses, providing posters, rack cards, and more, to help "spread the message, not the mussel."

The public is also asked not to confuse the invasive zebra and quagga mussels with the native, protected Rocky Mountain ridged mussels which are easier to detect because they are much larger, at about 12.5 cm (almost five inches) long.

Find information on the mussels, risks to the Okanagan, and prevention tips at [www.DontMoveAMussel.ca](http://www.DontMoveAMussel.ca).



Photo: Province of B.C.



Zebra and Quagga Mussel Sightings

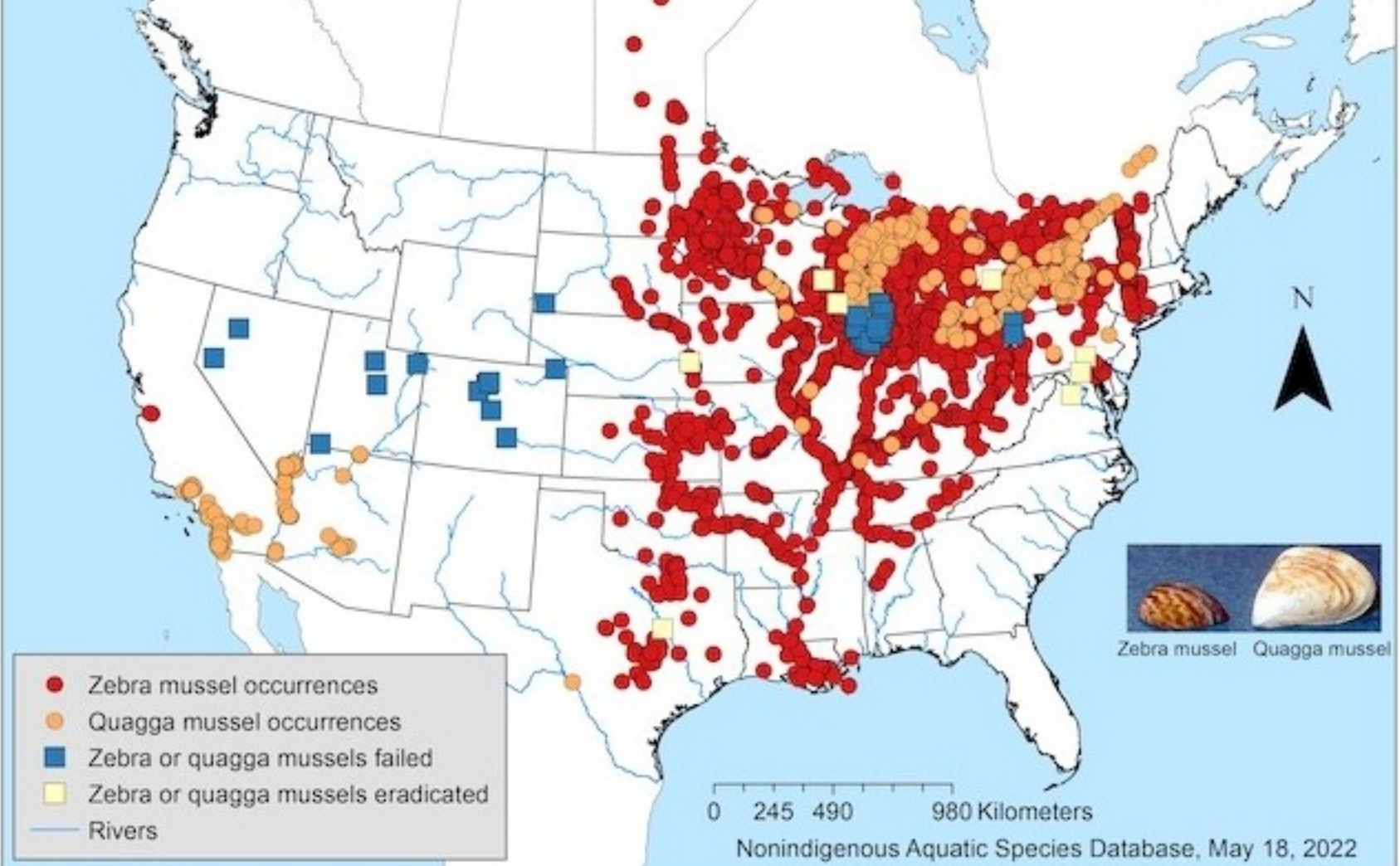


Photo: USGS

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