

# Invasive mussel war continues with information as a weapon

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2 Aug 2022 +2 more By J.P. SQUIRE

Joel Vandermeulen had a stern warning for Lake Country boaters on Sunday: “Don’t move a mussel.” The aquatic invasive species assistant for the Okanagan and Similkameen Invasive Species Society helps deliver the ‘Don’t move a mussel’ program for the Okanagan Basin Water Board.

By noon after his first hour at the Oyama boat launch, the co-op student had talked to 23 boaters about the threats from the invasive zebra and quagga mussels.

“We’re trying to increase boater and public awareness, to make sure that they are doing the right thing,” he said while manning a kiosk with information brochures next to the boat launch.

The ‘right things’ are: cleaning boats, trailers, outdrives and equipment such as fishing gear and waders of plant parts, animals and mud; draining onto land all items and compartments that



Joel Vandermeulen, aquatic invasive species assistant for the Okanagan and Similkameen Invasive Species Society, talked to Lake Country boaters at the Oyama boat launch Sunday about the threats from the invasive zebra and quagga mussels.

can hold water such as bilges, ballast wells and buckets; and drying all items completely before launching into another

“It’s pretty busy. The other day, Friday, I spoke to about 100 boaters here. I am responsible for going to boat launches all through the [Regional District of

North Okanagan]. So I go to Oyama, Kekuli Bay, Paddlewheel Park and Kalavista. I rotate through them for four and five hours a day May to August,” he

These small, freshwater bivalves — usually cream-coloured with darker bands or stripes — can spread between lakes via contaminated watercraft, boat trail-

ers, live bait wells and fishing gear. Adult zebra and quagga mussels can attach to virtually any solid surface, including boats, piers and other organisms.

Young mussels float in water for the first month so they will naturally move into lakes and rivers, and can be moved unknowingly.

Mussels have been discovered at boat checkstops on the Alberta and U.S. borders, he noted, adding: “We remind boaters that if they ever take their boats out-of-province, that they do get it checked. It is required by law.”

A 2013 study estimated that it could cost the Okanagan up to \$43 million if invasive mussels arrive.

“Globally, invasive species are the second largest threat to biodiversity after habitat loss,” said society executive director Lisa Scott.

Members of the Lake Country RCMP detachment were also at the Oyama boat launch on Sunday.

“We want to connect with boaters and people who are going to be enjoying the water today just to remind them again about safety on the water, to remind people not to be drinking and operating their vessels as well as to make sure they have all the necessary equipment with them such as life

jackets” said Cpl. Tammy Lobb, RCMP Lake Country watch commander. “It’s been excellent so far. Everybody is actually so happy to see us out today. We try to get out here as much as we can,” she added.

“Obviously that’s in-between other calls for service that we have to respond to,” she said.

“But the more times we can get out and connect with our community and do proactive engagement like this, the better. This will happen as many times as we

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