

EDITORIAL: Mussels require immediate action

By Vernon Morning Star

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Local officials aren't trying to be alarmist but there's no question an environmental, economic and social threat is at our door.

There is growing concern that zebra and quagga mussels will arrive in the Okanagan, just the latest stop on their spread across North America. The problem is they are indigenous to eastern Europe and they have played havoc with new world ecosystems such as Ontario's Great Lakes.

These mussels clog water intake pipes, pumps and boat motors. They also deplete food sources for fish and produce toxins that kill fish and birds and contaminate drinking water.

"The mussels can decompose bridges," said Juliette Cunningham, with the Okanagan Basin Water Board.

Tourism can also take a hit as, "They're like razor blades when they wash up on the beach," said Cunningham.

And the region has already had a close call.

In July 2012, quagga mussels were discovered on a boat that was transported to the Shuswap from Arizona. That situation was contained but it indicates how easily our environment could be changed forever.

Of course we are already familiar with the problems invasive species can cause in the Okanagan — mysis shrimp competing with kokanee for food and starlings devastating farm crops.

The Greater Vernon Advisory Committee is writing the federal government and demand action to address the spread of the zebra and quagga mussels.

And that is where the battle must start as it is federal and provincial authorities who have the resources and legislative power to restrict the movement of the mussels.

Of course the spread of the creatures across the continent may mean senior government has already dropped the ball.

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