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Osoyoos Mayor Says Mussels Are Too Dangerous to Ignore and Expects More Meetings

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They're barely visible to the naked eye, but the Mayor of Osoyoos doesn't want people to turn a blind eye to a pair of dangerous mussels that could ruin Okanagan waters and beaches.

After last week's meeting in Osoyoos to address the threat of zebra and quagga mussels that had four presenters and 30 to 40 attendees, Mayor Stu Wells says everyone in the region needs to continue the awareness campaign.

"When you understand what these mussels can do to bodies of water, it would just change our whole economic issues here with tourism, with fishing and everything. They'll change whole aquatic habitat patterns," said Wells.

The mussels have already devastated many of the Great Lakes and their surrounding beaches, but now they're starting to make their way through the United States and are heading towards the Northwest. Aquatic biologists say there's no way to get rid of the mussels once they arrive and they're also very difficult to keep out. However, Wells is more optimistic about preventing them from arriving in B.C., but says there's no price to put on the type of damage they could do the beaches and lakes of the Okanagan.

"When you turn a sandy beach into one that you have to wear river shoes on, what's the value of that? It's priceless," explains Wells. "There's no going back, there's no natural enemies and there's no stopping it. So the only hope we have in the province of British Columbia is to keep them from getting established here."

One positive step is a grant of \$30,000 that was recently given to the Invasive Mussel Prevention Programs in the North Okanagan, Central Okanagan and South Okanagan-Similkameen by the Okanagan Basin Water Board. Wells says that money will help create printed materials to be posted by the water for awareness, but he would like to see more meetings occur throughout the Okanagan. In fact, he believes that a meeting in Penticton will take place in the near future.

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