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NEWS

New rules to combat invasive mussels



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By Alistair Waters
Black Press

Better late than never.

That was how the chair of the Okanagan Basin Water Board summed up the local announcement Friday that the federal government is finally proposing new regulations to help fight off a possible invasion of zebra and quagga mussels into local lakes and waterways.

The water board has had a campaign calling for better monitoring for the invasive species mussels on boats entering B.C. for the last two-and-a-half years. The campaign is dubbed “Don’t Move A Mussel.”

While the mussels have not been introduced into any lake in B.C., there have been some close calls, the most recent earlier this year when an alert border guard at Osoyoos spotted a boat on a trailer entering from Washington and discovered it had some of the mussels attached to it.

The mussels are in several lakes south of the border and are feared by many here because they clog up pipes, destroy other water-born wildlife and cost millions to try and get rid of once they have arrived.

So, after years of calling on the federal government for help, Ottawa appears to finally be acting.

“It’s better late than never,” said West Kelowna Mayor Doug Findlater, who heads the OBWB board.

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“But we have our fingers crossed they will be in place for next year’s boating season.

Findlater said as it now stands, rules in U.S. states such as California, Oregon and Washington are currently B.C.’s line of defence against mussels entering the province. Those states, where the mussels have been found, have strict rules about cleaning boats, inside and outside, after being used in a lake known to contain the mussels.

The new Canadian regulations will allow all provinces and territories to compel boat owners who are suspected of either intentionally or unintentionally transporting invasive species such as zebra or quagga mussels into Canada to cooperate with authorities in ridding them from their boats before launching the vessels in local waters.

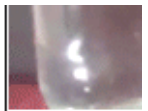
Okanagan-Coquihalla MP Dan Albas said last Friday the regulations are currently out for public comment for the next 30 days.

After public input is gathered, federal Fisheries and Oceans Minister Gail Shea will review the comments and move the regulations closer to becoming law.

When asked why it has taken the federal government so long to act, Albas said it was because they had to apply to all provinces and the current rules about invasive species are not the same across Canada.

While the regulations are only expected to affect a small number of boaters, the Invasive Species Council of B.C. is encouraging all boaters to adopt its “Clean, Drain and Dry” program to prevent transporting any unwanted material into B.C. waterbodies.

The new federal regulations will give Canadian Border Services Agency officers the ability to enforce prohibitions against the importation of invasive species at the border. The rules are currently only voluntary and, while most travellers with boats are willing to co-operate with border guards, there is nothing to compel them to do so now.



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