

Financial muscle for mussel awareness program

By Steve Arstad



Conservation officer Sgt. Jim Beck, Lisa Scott, Anna Warwick Sears, RBC Branch Manager Shirley Yipp, regional district chair Mark Pendergraft and Insp. Barb Leslie at the presentation of a \$100,000 grant to the Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen to help prevent the spread of zebra and quagga mussels on May 21, 2015. (STEVE ARSTAD /InfoTel Multimedia)

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PENTICTON - Waterways in the South Okanagan will receive an extra measure of protection in the fight to prevent the spread of an aquatic invasive species this summer.

The Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen received a \$100,000 grant from the project this week. The grant will be used to educate and inform the public, working in conjunction with a recently announced provincial initiative that will see three mobile inspection teams touring the province to check boats for zebra and quagga mussels.

The manager in charge of operations for the conservation office, Insp. Barb Leslie, says the six provincially hired mobile inspectors will begin training in Vernon next week.

Regional district project coordinator Zoe Kirk says the Blue Water Project grant was timely, pointing to the recent discovery by inspectors of a mussel infested boat about to be launched into Sylvan Lake, Alta.

She says the district, along with other Okanagan regional districts and the Okanagan Basin Water Board, will be mounting an education campaign that will work alongside the province's mobile units. In addition, mobile units will attend all high profile public events in the Okanagan and Similkameen valleys this summer, including beaches and other targeted sites. Staff will be working with members of the Okanagan and Similkameen Invasive Species Society to man the mobile units and attend events throughout both the region.

"We are really privileged. This is the largest of three water grants we have received over the past three

years and it's the maximum grant of a prevention program. The RBC understands the devastation these mussels can cause." Kirk says, adding the timing of the grant was critical to getting the message out this summer.

An infestation of zebra and quagga mussels could have devastating consequences on the region's waterways, with one estimate of the cost to the economy at \$40 million per year. It's essential all items in contact with mussel infected waters be thoroughly cleaned, drained and dried before being inserted into local waters because mussel larvae are microscopic and can easily be transported in ballast water, boat bilge, engine cooling systems, bait buckets and live wells. Canoes and other non-motorized watercraft are also potential carriers of mussels. More information can be found at dontmoveamussel.ca

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