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Dog to sniff out mussels

Darren Handschuh - Mar 30, 2017 / 1:31 pm



Madison Erhardt

The B.C. government is unleashing a new tool in the ongoing battle to keep invasive mussels out of the province.

The province is adding two new inspection stations, expanding inspection hours and the inspection operating season, more than doubling the number of inspectors, increasing public education, expanding scientific lake monitoring and providing Canada's first multi-purpose mussel-sniffing dog.

Kilo, a German Shepherd dog, is currently undergoing training to sniff out mussels – as well as

firearms and bear parts – and will also be used in evidence recovery cases. Beginning July 1, Kilo will be working with his conservation officer handler at high-volume stations on a rotating basis to help detect invasive mussels.

“Invasive mussels have spread to provinces and states throughout North America – but not yet in B.C., and we’re focused on keeping it that way,” said Premier Christy Clark. “That’s why we’re adding more inspection stations, extended hours and staff, and Canada’s first multi-purpose mussel-sniffing dog – to protect our most precious resource, our waterways.”

Two new border inspection stations will open at Yahk and Midway, bringing the number of inspection stations in B.C. to 10.

The province’s busiest station at Golden will be open 24 hours. The remaining nine stations will have hours extended generally from dawn to dusk. However, actual opening and closing times will vary to help ensure compliance.

To support the new stations and extended hours, the province is also adding 35 inspection officers to the program, for a total of 68 auxiliary conservation officers.

The province is providing the Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation with three years of support to expand government’s ongoing invasive mussel lake monitoring to detect potential invasive mussel larvae. This will help build capacity for local stewardship groups to become involved in early detection – a critical first step in preventing invasive mussels from becoming established.

“A lot of the items that have been on our wish list are being announced today,” said Okanagan Basin Water board chair Tracy Gray.

“We look forward to continuing to work with the province, as well as the federal government and other partners, to build a program that will keep our waters invasive mussel-free. For our part, we are committed to continuing our efforts through our Don’t Move A Mussel program and encourage everyone to do their part.”

B.C. NDP Shelly Cook said she’s happy to hear the announcement, but feels as though issues are being ignored.

“Prevention is the goal. We can’t forget about the other crucial issues regarding increased oversight at the borders around prevention.”

Conservation officers will be increasing enforcement of existing penalties, which can include fines up to \$50,000 for a first offence for illegally transporting mussels anywhere in B.C.

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