

[http://www.kelownadailycourier.ca/news/article\\_9a6d05e4-78cf-11e7-b975-6731b43d13e4.html](http://www.kelownadailycourier.ca/news/article_9a6d05e4-78cf-11e7-b975-6731b43d13e4.html)

## Report of invasive mussel on trailer in lake false alarm

Steve MacNaull **Aug 3, 2017**



B.C. is free of the invasive and damaging Zebra mussel, above, and wants to keep it that way.

File photo

Whew.

The scary report of an invasive zebra mussel attached to a boat trailer that went in and out of Okanagan Lake has turned out to be false.

"We take all accounts that come in to the RAP (Report All Poachers and Polluters) line very seriously," said invasive mussel program co-ordinator Martina Beck of the Ministry of Environment.

"We received that report, tracked down the trailer and it ended up to be just organic material."

Zebra mussels are small — about the size of your thumbnail — but if they get into a lake, they cause havoc.

Despite being diminutive, they have voracious appetites and wipe out food supplies, so there's hardly any left over for native fish species, such as kokanee salmon, and native freshwater mussels that are good for our lakes.

Zebra mussels can also attach themselves to virtually anything, which means they can clog water intakes and hydro power facilities, and damage anything that's in the water, from pilings and docks to boat engines and hulls.

B.C. is currently free of zebra mussels and its close relative, the quagga mussel.

The province wants to keep it that way.

That's why it has done extensive awareness campaigns to urge boaters to make sure they aren't inadvertently transferring zebra or quagga mussels from one body of water to another.

The nasty little mussels came from Europe and somehow made it to the Great Lakes.

B.C. wants to stop the spread and has set up inspection stations at 10 crossings into the province to make sure boats coming in from Alberta, Washington, Idaho and Montana are free of the mussels.

Of the 19,000 boats inspected this season, 15 have been found to be infected with zebra mussels.

Such boats are quarantined for 30 days and cleansed of the mussels.

The report of the zebra mussel in Kelowna came from a man from Montana who lives in Kelowna part time.

He took it upon himself to inspect 520 boats and trailers over two weeks as they came and went from the Cook Road boat launch beside the Hotel Eldorado.

The man, who doesn't wish to be identified, said he did the inspections and data collection outside the official government system because he's concerned about invasive mussels and Eurasian milfoil getting into Okanagan Lake.

The man created a two-page report that looked like an official news release and sent it to media, Beck at the ministry, Kelowna-Mission MLA Steve Thomson, Kelowna Coun. Luck Stack and provincial Green Party Leader Andrew Weaver.

Thomson just took the report as information.

Beck considered it a Report All Poachers and Polluters submission and had the zebra mussel sighting investigated. It was deemed false.

Lake users can find out more on the Okanagan Basin Water Board's website, DontMoveAMussel.ca.

The board also wants to educate the public that while zebra and quagga mussels are bad, the native Rocky Mountain ridged mussel, which is bigger, is endangered and good for the lake.

Besides the zebra mussel scare, the man reported 42 cases of milfoil on boats and trailers coming and going from the launch.

"We can't confirm those 42 reports of milfoil, but we already know milfoil is in Okanagan Lake and surrounding lakes," said Beck.

"We have treatment programs for that."

However, those programs have been stymied this year by a cold winter, spring flooding and the hot summer.

Milfoil has roots in the lake bottom, and its foliage grows underwater as well as forms dense mats on the surface that are unpleasant for swimmers and boaters.

Over winter, milfoil rototillers generally take to the lakes to uproot and dispose of milfoil.

However, the cold winter meant most lakes froze over and rototillers didn't get to work.

The spring runoff, flooding and hot weather provided additional nutrients to milfoil just as it started its spring growth spurt.

All that unsavoury growth is being exposed now that the lake level is dropping to normal levels.

Boaters are asked to stay away from the mess because shearing off the weeds partially encourages them to spread.

If milfoil pieces remain on the boat or trailer, they can be transferred to other lakes or other parts of the lake when the boat goes in the water again.

