



Invasive mussels on a boat prop. Photo: Capital News files

Tightening the defense against invasive mussels

Potential added scrutiny for Okanagan boating events

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It began from a conversation Toni Clark engaged in with a biologist at a recreation volleyball game in Kelowna.

What evolved was Clark realizing there was a potential breach in the efforts to prevent zebra and quagga mussel invasive species from gaining a foothold in Okanagan Lake and other local waterways.

“We just started chatting and he told me he was a biologist, and I told him I was doing this event that could bring people and boats here from across Canada, and I asked what we could do to educate people about our lake. And he said we should educate people about the mussels issue,” Clark recalled.



That concern hadn't occurred to Clark, so she contacted the Okanagan Basin Water Board office, and her questions in turn gave pause to the OBWB staff to the reality that local lake boating events raise the potential for vessels from outside the province slipping through the mussel inspection station cracks.

Related: [Invasive mussel warnings unheeded](#)

The event Clark was helping organize at the time was the Melges national sailing championships, hosted by Kelowna two years ago.

Clark said there was some reluctance among the organizing committee to deal with the inconvenience to ensure boats from outside the province were inspected and mussel decontaminated, with a concern some boat owners would choose not to travel here because of the hassle. Better, the theory went, to let boat owners address that issue on their own.

"But after contacting the water board office, we found out the process could be pretty streamlined in terms of how you alert participants during the registration process, and we found the out-of-province boat owners were 100 per cent understanding about it," Clark recalled.

"They get it because in many cases lakes where they were coming from already were already infested with mussels, so they knew first-hand what we were trying to prevent. The idea that people would be put off by a mussel inspection notice turned out to be completely false."

Clark went through the process a second time last summer in helping organize a sailing championship event for disabled sailors, where specially outfitted boats were brought in from across Canada.

Since Clark's initial inquiries two years ago, the water board has developed protocols to assist groups putting on boating events on local lakes, provides education kiosks at those events to help the public education process about the destructive potential of mussels reaching our waters and worked with provincial authorities for on-site boat inspection and decontamination services.

"It is a seamless process to deal with and it's about protecting our lake," Clark noted.

Clark, now retired but who volunteers her time to help stage community events, said a fishing derby tends to generally be less of a concern because it's mostly local anglers who take part.

But an upcoming derby planned for Osoyoos Lake did generate some discussion at last week's water board meeting in Penticton, out of concern that American anglers taking part could take part and bypass the nearby border inspection station because the lake crosses the U.S.-Canada boundary.

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