

ENVIRONMENT

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## Okanagan board pushing for stronger invasive mussel regulations after B.C. reports 10 contaminated watercraft



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The Okanagan Basin Water board is calling for tougher regulations regarding aquatic invasive species after new statistics from the province's boat inspection program.

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The Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) is calling for stronger invasive mussel regulations after several contaminated watercraft were intercepted by provincial

inspectors this spring and summer.

Citing provincial statistics from April 1 to July 5, the OBWB said 384 watercraft were intercepted coming into B.C., resulting in 35 decontamination orders with quarantine periods.

Of the 35, nine boats and one kayak were found to be carrying adult invasive mussels.

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The OBWB said the contaminated watercraft hailed from Ontario (six), Utah (two), North Carolina (one) and Michigan (one). Two of the 10 were headed to the Okanagan, while the others were destined for Vancouver Island (three), the Lower Mainland (two), the Kootenays (two) and Alaska (one).

The OBWB noted that B.C.'s invasive mussel defence program received advance notice from other jurisdictions on eight of the 10 mussel-fouled watercraft.

Further, of the 384 watercraft, 92 decontaminations were done as a precaution against other aquatic invasive species.

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“Until we know we are in the clear and there is no chance of invasive mussels making their way into our waters, we are going to be pushing for senior government to do all they can to protect our waters,” said OBWB chairperson Sue McKortoff.

“Our lakes are not only an important tourist destination, they are important as a source of drinking water, to our fishery and the Okanagan’s delicate ecosystem and much more.”

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The OBWB is calling for legislation requiring that all watercraft entering B.C. to be

inspected before being allowed to launch in provincial waters.

It is also recommending the province implement “pull the plug” legislation requiring drain plugs be removed from watercraft before transport.

Further, it recommends renewing a public-private partnership that has helped fund the inspection program and expires in early 2021. The board is also calling for the province to increase the program’s funding to at least the 2017 level of \$4.45 million to expand and strengthen it.

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“It’s wonderful that we have 64 inspectors, three full-status conservation officers who can chase down those who fail to stop at inspection stations and two canines to help sniff out mussels,” McKortoff said.

“But we only have one of 12 provincial inspection stations that are open 24 hours a day, and there is no requirement to get an inspection when a station is closed. We need to tighten things up. This is of paramount importance.”

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