



Invasive Mussel inspection station (Photo credit: Okanagan Basin Water Board)

POTENTIAL FOR MULTI-MILLIONS IN DAMAGE

By Kevin Rothwell

Invasive mussel inspection stations are now open

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Current travel restrictions may mean fewer watercraft entering B.C. this spring and summer, but inspectors will still be on the lookout for harmful zebra and quagga mussels hitching a ride on boats.

From now until late October, inspectors with the B.C. Conservation Officer Service (COS) will check boats for aquatic invasive species as part of the province's Invasive Mussel Defence Program (IMDP). Inspectors are educating people about the importance of Clean, Drain and Dry—preventative steps that all boaters should practise when moving between lakes and rivers.

“Invasive species like zebra and quagga mussels are a major threat to our ecosystems and infrastructure in British Columbia,” George Heyman, Minister of Environment and Climate Change Strategy, said. “Through our program, we’re taking the necessary steps to protect our waterways today and for the years to come.”

The program has three main components: watercraft inspections, lake monitoring, and public outreach and education. Last year, nearly 30,000 inspections found 16 mussel-fouled boats coming from Ontario, Arkansas, Wisconsin and Manitoba.

Anyone transporting a watercraft (sailboats, motorboats, car toppers, kayaks, canoes and paddle boats) in B.C. is required to stop at an open inspection station. Failing to stop can result in a \$345 fine.

number for 2021. There are no inspections stations at the U.S. border, which is currently closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, however commercial boat transportation companies are working with the province when transporting a vessel into B.C.

Unlike B.C.'s native mussels, zebra and quagga mussels attach to hard surfaces, allowing them to move between water-bodies by boats and equipment. The mussels multiply rapidly and are extremely difficult to eradicate once they become established in an area.

In 2013, the economic impacts of invasive mussels to hydropower, agricultural irrigation, municipal water supplies and recreational boating were estimated to be \$43 million per year if introduced into B.C. This does not include additional impacts on commercial and recreational fisheries, tourism or property values.

The Okanagan-Shuswap region is particularly vulnerable due to the significant inbound travel to the region from Alberta.