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Community members wanted to help monitor for invasive mussels

Special to The Herald Jul 30, 2021



OASISS has been monitoring Okanagan lakes for invasive mussels for nine years. Local residents with private docks are being asked to assist.

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The Okanagan and Similkameen Invasive Species Society (OASISS) is launching the second year of a citizen science project that involves community members in protecting Okanagan lakes from invasive zebra and quagga mussels.

The project seeks residents who own private docks on Kalamalka, Wood, Okanagan, Skaha and Osoyoos lakes. Volunteers will be provided with a pair of invasive mussel monitors to be attached to their docks and will be required to check them every two weeks throughout August and September.

“Our Society has been checking for invasive mussels for nine years. However, this initiative greatly expands our efforts to locations that were previously inaccessible,” says Lisa Scott, Executive Director of OASISS.

The project is funded by the RBC Foundation through RBC Tech for Nature. It is conducted in partnership with the Ministry Environment and Climate Change Strategy as part of the Invasive Mussel Defence Program.

Zebra and Quagga mussels, also known as invasive mussels, were introduced from Eastern Europe and Western Russia to the Great Lakes Region in the 1980s. They have spread into lakes around North America, mainly by contaminated watercraft. BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Oregon, Idaho and Washington are still believed to be mussel-free.

If invasive mussels were to arrive to the Okanagan, they could cause irreversible damage. In regions where they are already established, invasive mussels damage sensitive ecosystems, clog water intake pipes and water infrastructure, ruin beaches, affect water quality and impact tourism. Research by the Okanagan Basin Water Board estimated a mussel infestation would cost the Okanagan at least \$42 million a year just to manage.

“We are extremely concerned about the possibility of invasive mussels arriving here,” says Scott. “They are nearly impossible to get rid of once they become established. It’s imperative as a community to do everything we can to protect our lakes from an invasion.”

To register for the project, contact oasiss.register@gmail.com or call Sierra at 250-718-7901.

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