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ENVIRONMENT

17 boats with invasive mussels stopped from entering B.C.

By Kathy Michaels · Global News
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BC Conservation Officers made an alarming discovery on Saturday. A woman in Terrace found invasive Zebra mussels in her aquarium. Conservation Officers south of the border first alerted authorities in Canada that shipments of moss balls, decorative plants that are often used in aquariums and ponds, were found contaminated with an invasive species of mussel – Mar 6, 2021

Pandemic conditions didn't stop boaters from heading to B.C. this summer, and a small proportion arrived with invasive mussels in tow.

Insp. Dave Webster, in charge of the mussel defence program for the B.C. Conservation Officer Service, said in a report to the Okanagan Water Basin Board that compliance appears to be increasing as public awareness continues to grow.

"Most who are unaware seem to have only acquired a watercraft since the beginning of the pandemic, as people were staying closer to home," reads the report.

Coronavirus: More domestic travel in B.C. could spell trouble for spread of invasive mussels – Jun 15, 2020

The report to the water board states that 33,000 inspections were conducted in 2021, up from 29,900 inspections a year earlier.

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Of all these inspections, there were 244 boats of varying kinds coming into B.C. identified as high-risk for invasive zebra or quagga mussels while 17 were confirmed carrying the mussels. In 2020 there were 16 mussels-fouled boats stopped, 22 in 2019 and 25 in 2018 and 2017.

Ontario accounted for the majority of these, with seven from there stopped with mussels attached. There were an additional two from Manitoba, one from Quebec, Colorado, Michigan, Missouri, Illinois, Ohio, Wisconsin and Minnesota.

Eight of these boats were headed to the Okanagan, four to the Lower Mainland, three to Vancouver Island, one to the Kootenays, and one to Skeena.

Mussels intercepted by B.C. inspectors – Jul 18, 2019

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

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The provincial government said in a 2013 economic impact study that invasive mussels could cost B.C. $43 million a year if they were introduced into provincial waterways. Hydro, agricultural irrigation, municipal water supplies and recreational boating could be impacted if they arrived.

The water board is requesting that B.C.'s Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services restore funding of the mussel inspection program funding to at least 2017 levels with $3.8 million a year, and adjustments for inflation going forward.