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On the front lines of the invasive mussel war

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By Don Urquhart, Times Chronicle

Climate Change Strategy. Don Urquhart photo

species.

It could almost be considered a war and one that carries with it a potential \$62 million price tag should that conflict be lost.

This is part one of a two part series on the fight to keep B.C.'s waters free of invasive mussel

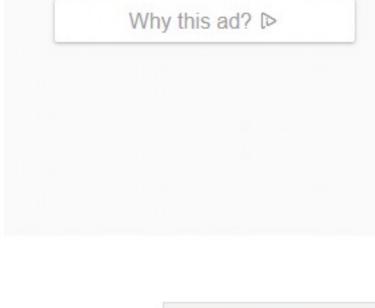
of B.C. is being waged successfully thanks to rising awareness amongst the general public and critically the "boots on the ground" in the form of inspectors from the B.C. Conservation Officer Service.

Right now the battle to keep zebra and quagga mussels – both aquatic invasive species – out

The \$62 million economic toll that these two species would Ads by Google take should they make it into B.C. waters is only an Stop seeing this ad estimate, but one based on the real life experience of

ballast.

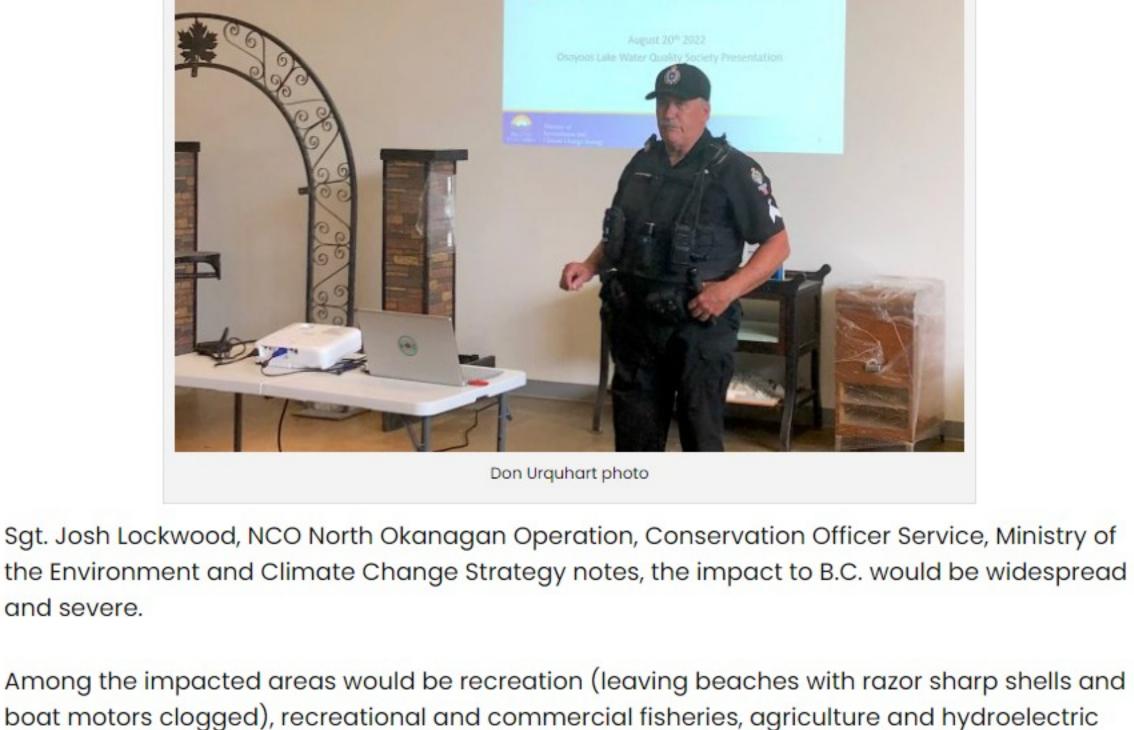
Ontario and various U.S. states.



and severe.

Canada-wide aquatic invasive species cost the country at least \$580 million per year (2017 figure). Both zebra and quagga mussels are native to the Black Sea region and were introduced to Ontario in the late 1980s via ship

BC Invasive Mussel Defence Program



facilities (clogged water intake pipes), and municipal infrastructure. The speed with which the mussels spread make them very difficult to eradicate and very costly to remove once established.

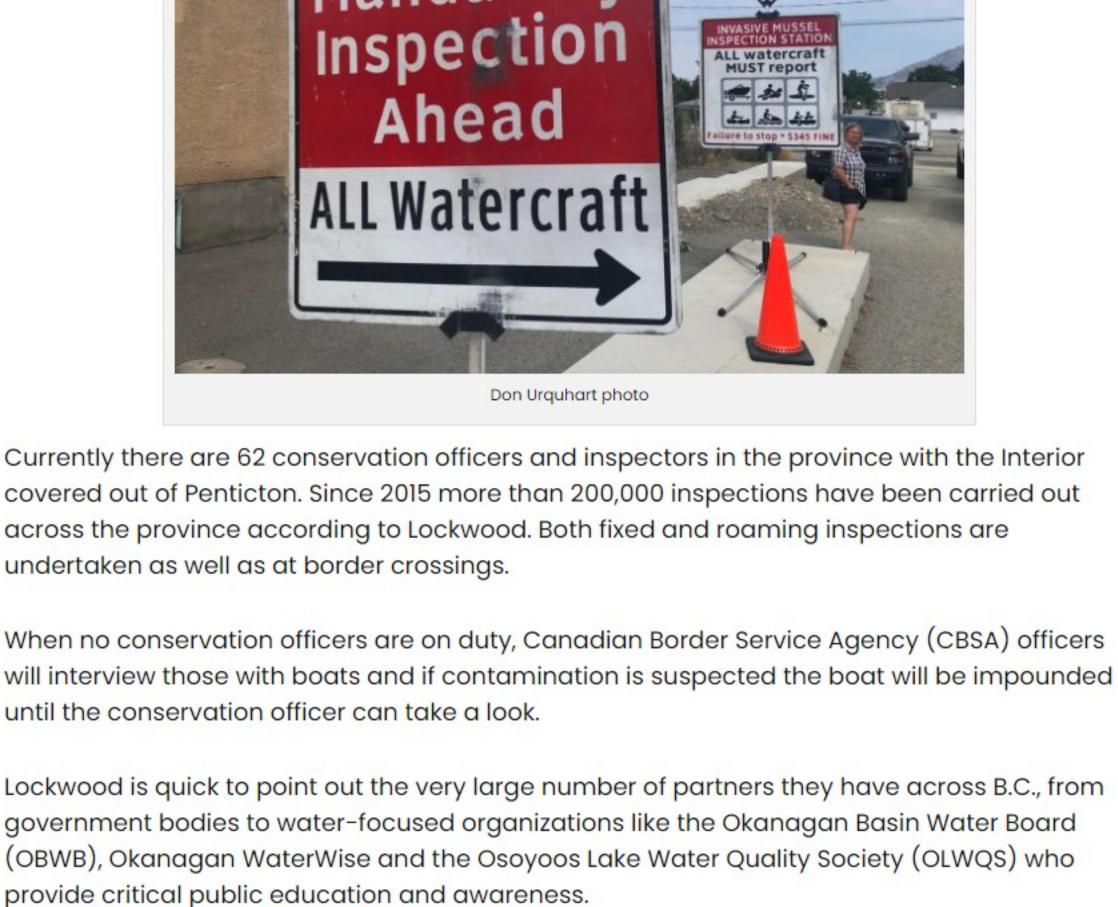
conservation officers who have substantial enforcement capabilities. This was at the behest of Lockwood who had been tasked with setting up the mussel monitoring program in 2015 but then pushed for better enforcement powers.

Luckily for B.C. waters the fight to keep the province free of this invasive mussel scourge got

some added, pardon the pun, "muscle" back in 2018 when biologists were joined by

Mandatory

The conservation officers hold Special Provincial Constable Status under the Police Act and have legal powers of search and seizure similar to that of police.



paddleboards – are required to stop at highway inspection stations and ad hoc mobile inspections as well. Failing to stop for inspection will result in an immediate \$345 fine and confiscation of the water craft for inspection. The transport of zebra and quagga mussels violates both Federal and Provincial laws and

boaters can be fined, at minimum, \$252 per specimen, for every mussel found on their boat

up to a maximum fine of \$100,000.

pressurised water.

gear;

that time the seal would be broken.

All boaters – which includes motorboats, sailboats, kayaks, canoes, windsurfers and even

Benham, Aquatics Invasive Species Inspector with the Conservation Officer Service, Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change Strategy explains, the mussels make the hull feel like sandpaper. The main focus however is typically on the engine, around the gimbal, the propeller and the main intake areas.

On larger boats they also use a flexible microscope. "They are really small and quite hard to

discover but we know exactly where to look." They even hide in some of the drive slots on little

Inspection is as simple as running a hand along the hull of the boat because as Rebecca

bolt and screw heads, she added. Boat trailers are also inspected. If mussels are found or if they suspect there may be some they can't see, the boat will then be decontaminated by high pressure wash with very hot water. This includes running the hot water through the running boat engine. And if trailers have been dunked they too will be

inspected and pressure washed if necessary. Significantly no chemicals are used, only hot

Boat owners are also interviewed about where they've been and where they're going which helps determine if they have come from a high-risk area. They also check for "drain, clean and dry" for other invasive species as well such as eurasion water-milfoil. If mussels are detected on a boat but they have no ability to decontaminate it on the spot, the

boat would then be sealed and a "Decontamination Order" would be placed on it. The boat

must then be decontaminated or inspected again after 10 days. If the boat is launched before

The conservation officers also get a hand from their canine colleagues, K9 Kilo and K9 Major who, with their finely tuned sense of smell, can pick out an invasive mussel in no time. B.C., Alberta, and Washington state are the only jurisdictions with invasive mussel detection dogs. A key aspect to keeping mussels out of B.C. is for boaters to practice "Clean, Drain, Dry".

Clean all plants, animals and mud from the boat and equipment including things like fishing

 Drain onto land all the water from bait buckets, live wells, pumps, motor, bilges and removing the drain plug;

