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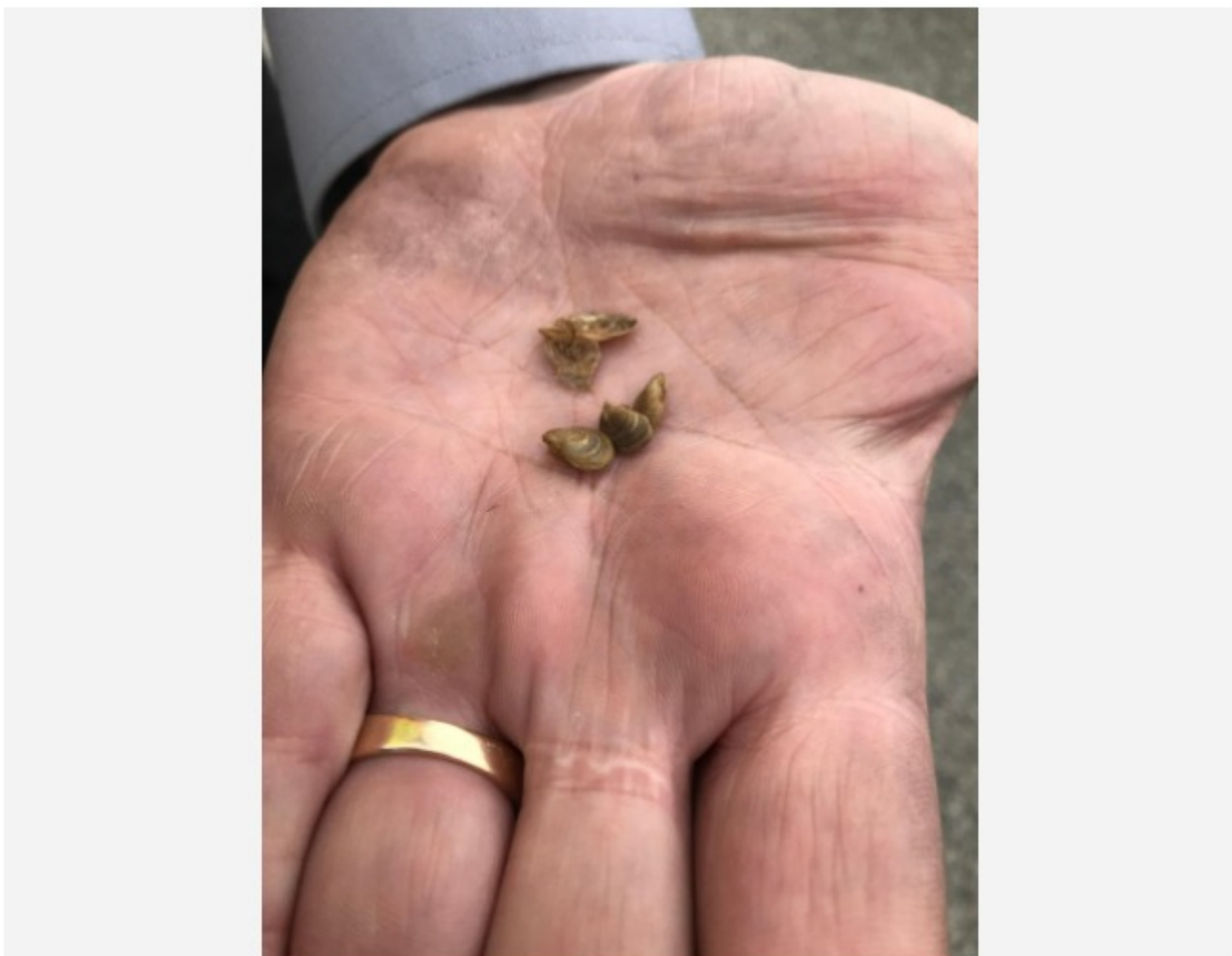
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MUSSELS YOU DON'T WANT TO SEE ON THE BEACH



REGAN BARTEL
Thursday, March 10th 2022 - 10:44 am



As boating season quickly approaches and COVID-19 travel restrictions ease, the Okanagan Basin Water Board is calling on the province to bolster its Invasive Mussel Defence Program (IMDP) in preparation for what is expected to be a busy tourist season.

The local government agency sent a letter to B.C.'s Minister of Environment and Climate Change, George Heyman, with a list of six calls to action.

"Since 2015, the IMDP has prevented 137 infested watercraft from entering provincial waters by conducting more than 220,000 inspections. Many of the infested watercraft were headed to high-risk Okanagan waters. Still, gaps remain in prevention," the letter reads.

For one, there are still motorists with watercraft who are failing to stop at mandatory, open inspection stations. Given that inspectors snagged 17 zebra and/or quagga mussel-fouled watercraft this summer during times when the stations were open, it raises the question as to how many more come in outside of inspection hours.

Also, a review of last summer's provincial mussel inspection numbers indicates that, for the second year in a row, the Okanagan is the top destination for these watercraft. This year, eight of the 17 infested watercraft were headed to our valley.

"If we are B.C.'s #1 destination for incoming mussel-infested watercraft, and we are encouraging tourism, we need to be better prepared," explains Sue McKortoff, Chair of the Water Board (OBWB) and Mayor of the border-town of Osoyoos.

Watercraft purchases have increased in the last couple of years, on both sides of the border, as people were staying closer to home. Now with the border opening up, it's expected more people will be coming with their water toys, increasing the chances of invasive mussels being introduced to B.C. waters.