



Kelowna

INVADERS COULD DESTROY LAKES

New report details massive cost of invasive mussel infestation

Rob Gibson - Jun 9, 2023 / 5:10 pm



Photo: OBWB-OkWaterWise
A mussels sniffing dog at work in B.C.

The Okanagan Basin Water Board is sounding the alarm on invasive zebra and quagga mussels being brought into the Okanagan as the peak boating season rolls in.

The Okanagan is at high risk for an infestation of zebra and quagga mussels because of the valley's warm waters and calcium content, and the thousands of tourists who bring their boats to the Okanagan every summer.

"As far as we know, there are no invasive mussels that have made it into Okanagan lakes, but keeping it this way requires extreme vigilance," says OBWB executive director Anna Warwick Sears.

A recent [B.C. government report](#) suggests a zebra or quagga mussel infestation would cost the province \$64M to \$129M annually. But that report has holes in it, according to the OBWB.

"We appreciate the level of detail given by your report, looking at the potential financial impacts of invasive mussels on hydro facilities, irrigation infrastructure, municipal water treatment facilities, domestic water intakes, losses in property values and property taxes, tourism, boats and marinas. However, the report does not, and probably could not calculate the terrible impacts these mussels would cause to our natural systems," says a letter from the group sent to the province.

The provincial report published last month notes that the Okanagan's economy would take a hit, due to its reliance on the lake for tourism.

"While water-based tourism is a small percentage of overall tourism in the province, local impacts may be significant in moderate- and high-risk sub-watersheds in the Kootenay and Okanagan regions, where water-based activities are a more significant draw for tourists," the report said.

The letter sent by OBWB to the government urges vigilant action to prevent an infestation.

"The OBWB has provided many specific calls to action in the past. We are grateful for those you have acted upon, and we encourage you to go further and make this a top priority for both your ministries," the letter concludes.

The water board first sounded the alarm regarding mussels back in 2012 and in 2013 and launched its ["Don't Move A Mussel"](#) campaign to raise awareness.

Since then, they have partnered with the Okanagan and Similkameen Invasive Species Society, providing money to help spread the message and encourage the use of Clean, Drain, Dry protocols for watercraft.

In 2015, the mussel inspection program started and each year since inspectors have intercepted mussel-fouled watercraft on their way into B.C.

"The costs of an infestation is appalling on two levels. The first is the gross costs which will make us all poorer. But more importantly, it makes you think about all we value that can't be qualified. I love the beaches and the clean water, and I don't want to lose them," says Sears.



Photo: OBWB-OkWaterWise

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