



Think Local

PLEASE DON'T MOVE A MUSSEL

## Okanagan's biggest threat is actually tiny

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Photo: Contributed  
B.C. Conservation Officer Service's Sgt. Cynthia Mann inspects a boat for invasive mussels with K-9 Major.

The culprit can be hard to spot, but the potential damage is immeasurable.

Okanagan residents are being urged to spread awareness to incoming visitors regarding the threat of zebra and quagga mussels to the region.

The mussels are known to hitch a ride in water, plants, mud and animals that find their way onto or inside motorized boats, as well as non-motorized water recreation equipment, including kayaks and paddleboards.

With tourism entering peak season, the potential is dangerously high for watercraft owners traveling across Canada and up from the United States to launch a contaminated vessel into one of the Okanagan's beautiful lakes.



Photo: Contributed  
2023 Don't Move A Mussel campaign poster

Zebra and quagga mussels originate from freshwater lakes in Russia and Ukraine, where they have natural predators that keep the ecosystem in check. However, as they've been introduced to North American waters, with no natural predators, they have been multiplying rapidly, forming dense colonies that create dire ecological and economic consequences.

A new report from the B.C. government states that managing a mussel infestation could cost between \$64 and \$129 million annually. However, it's truly impossible to estimate the potential ecological losses.

"The report simply can't account for the damage an invasion would cause to the quality of life in the Okanagan," says [Okanagan Basin Water Board](#) communications director Corinne Jackson, who also manages the water board's [Okanagan WaterWise](#) program and its [Don't Move A Mussel](#) campaign.

"For example, the razor sharp shells make it impossible to walk barefoot on the beach, the mussels would devastate fisheries and recreational fishing, there's the potential to have to quarantine lakes, they can create toxic algae blooms, and that's really just the tip of the iceberg."

For that reason, officials are strongly urging tourists hauling any type of watercraft to stop at all mussel inspection stations along their travel route into B.C.

Another reason to stop is that it's the law, with failure to do so resulting in a \$345 fine and potentially other stiff penalties, including six months in jail and federal fines up to \$100,000.

"Interactions with boaters in the Okanagan have determined that between 24% and 33% of boats from out of province are not stopping at a B.C. inspection station," [Okanagan and Similkameen Invasive Species Society](#) executive director Lisa Scott says.

"This is alarming, since we know that it would only take one boat infested with mussels to impact our waterways and change things forever," adds Scott, whose organization has been helping OBWB and OkWaterWise extend the reach of its Don't Move a Mussel campaign.

With the Okanagan's lakes being a tourism hot spot, it has become the number one destination in B.C. for infested watercraft from eastern provinces and the U.S.

This fact, along with the combination of the valley's calcium-rich and warm waters that are responsible for the beautiful turquoise colour, provide the perfect conditions for these mussels to thrive.

As a result, it is critical that anyone bringing watercraft from outside of B.C. into the province stop at all [inspection stations](#) along the way and to follow clean, drain and dry protocols before loading up their watercraft and while visiting.



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"Do not launch any boat into any B.C. waters until you have received instruction from a B.C. provincial aquatic invasive species inspector," Jackson cautions.

Following the clean, drain, dry protocols involves cleaning and removing any visible mussels, algae or aquatic plants from boats, trailers and equipment. Boaters should also drain all water from their vessel's live well, bilge and bait bucket, and all drain plugs should be pulled while transporting. The final step is to dry the boat and equipment before entering a new body of water, as invasive mussels can live 30 days out of water and in a damp space.

Being diligent with these simple steps can make a world of difference in preventing an invasive mussel infestation in the Okanagan.

While the Don't Move A Mussel campaign is celebrating its 10th year, having started in 2013, B.C.'s mussel inspection program began in 2015. Since then, inspectors have intercepted mussel-fouled watercraft each year.

Learn more about the mussels, the risks to the Okanagan and prevention tips at [www.DontMoveAMussel.ca](http://www.DontMoveAMussel.ca).



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