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Half the boats carrying invasive mussels into BC heading to Thompson-Okanagan

Rob Munro



August 19, 2023 - 6:00 AM

Out of eight boats found to be carrying invasive mussels into BC so far this year, three were headed to the Okanagan and one to the Thompson-Nicola area.

ith Major checking a boat for invasive mus

That's up slightly from the 47% detected in the last two years and a big jump from the 18% headed to the region in 2019.

The zebra and quagga mussels can live out of water for up to a month and once introduced into lakes they

can spread fast and cause major damage. And, while the number of boats detected is small, the impact of them getting in lakes or rivers is huge. "We know it will only take one infested watercraft launching in local waters to set off a chain of catastrophic

events," says an Okanagan Basin Water Board news release. "If allowed to enter into local waters, the mussels will put drinking water at risk, the local fishery and ecosystem will be upended, sandy beaches will be un-walkable without shoes." The eight boats amounted to 10% of the high risk watercraft that were inspected between April and mid-

July. The other three boats were headed to the Lower Mainland (one) or unconfirmed destinations.



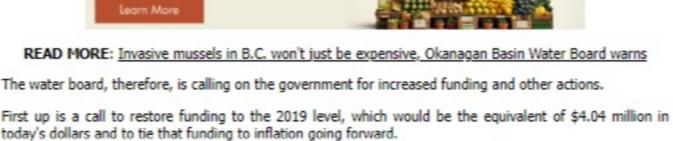
That's due not only to budget cuts, but increasing difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff to do the

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work. "These cuts are especially troubling, given the province's own economic analysis that shows an annual cost

of a mussel infestation in BC would range from \$64 to \$129 million annually," the news release says. "This

cost estimate does not include impacts to aquatic ecosystems and fish populations." **Providing An Outlet**



In 2019, there were 12 inspection stations and 64 staff. In 2022, those numbers were cut in half.

Hiring staff into temporary seasonal jobs is difficult as is finding housing, often in remote areas during peak

tourism and fire season. "This may require increasing pay levels to attract qualified candidates," the news release says.

Legislative changes are also needed. Since 2019, the water board has been lobbying the provincial government to pass "pull the plug"

legislations, requiring all boats to remove their drain plugs before hitting the road. All other western provinces have had such legislation in place since 2019.

The mussels have not yet been found in waterways in Alberta or Saskatchewan, but are firmly established further east in Canada and in the northwestern U.S.

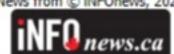
With new technology it's now easier to analyze travel patterns and water chemistry to determine areas at

greatest rick of infestation. That water board, therefore, wants the province to use those tools to to better plan ways to combat the mussels.

For more information on these invasive species, go here. To contact a reporter for this story, email Rob Munro or call 250-808-0143 or email the editor. You can also submit photos, videos or news tips to the newsroom and be entered to win a monthly prize draw.

READ MORE: Thousands of invasive mussels removed from vessel heading to B.C.

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