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Don't Move a Mussel campaign returns to keep invasive mussels out of B.C. waters

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HOME



ole of Seadoo enthusiasts practice clean, drain, dry. Okanagan and אווווגame

Photo: OASISS

have been helping spread the ?Don?t Move A Mussel? message at boat launches and events around the Okanagan since the campaign began in 2013. With the summer sunshine here and people planning to return to area lakes, the Okanagan Basin Water Board's (OBWB)outreach and education program, Okanagan WaterWise, is relaunching its

annual "Don't Move a Mussel" campaign. The campaign, which started in 2013, aims to keep invasive zebra and quagga mussels out of Okanagan waterways by raising awareness and support among local residents, but also local

governments, tourism organizations, water-related businesses and more. The water board has

also been a strong advocate for stronger protection measures, lobbying the Province of B.C. and

the federal government for increased funding for watercraft inspection stations. This year, with invasive mussels closer than ever after being detected last fall in Idaho's Snake River and Clear Lake, MB, the campaign is encouraging locals with friends and family heading to the area with boats and other watercraft, to be extra vigilant.

After five years of pushing by the OBWB, and recognizing the threat posed by invasive aquatic species, the province implemented a "pull-theplug" order in May.



can

be.

stations in B.C. just four years earlier.

confirmed to be mussel-fouled.

do this would be \$4 mill.

COS.Aquatic.Invasive.Species@gov.bc.ca.

That

"This is an important step forward," said Corinne Jackson, communications director of the OBWB, explaining how the invasive mussels can live 30 days out of water, but in a damp space. "B.C. is

following in the footsteps of other provinces and

'pull the plug' is now the law." Under the new order, B.C. requires drainage plugs on watercraft to be pulled open while the boat is being transported. Watercraft coming into B.C. are also required to

stop at all inspection stations along their route.

So, if someone is coming to the Okanagan from

Ontario, they must stop at all stations they come

across in their home province, as well as

Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and B.C. That includes not just boats but also non-motorized watercraft. such as canoes, kayaks and Currently, there are six permanent inspection stations in B.C.—in Dawson Creek, Mt. Robson, Golden, Olsen on the B.C.-Alberta border, Yahk and Osoyoos There are also two roving stations, one based in Penticton and the other based in Chilliwack. "If an inspection station is closed when you're coming through, watercraft owners should contact

(RAPP)

or

emailing

Permanent Inspection Station
Roving Inspection Station

Jackson encourages everyone with watercraft to clean, drain, and dry their water toys after leaving a waterway.

While Don't Move A Mussel is aimed at informing the public and others about how to prevent

calling

1-877-952-7277

B.C.'s Invasive Mussel Defence Program for instruction," Jackson said.

by

done

invasive mussels from entering the Okanagan, the OBWB has also been working to determine gaps in prevention and ways to address these. In 2023, B.C. had 43 inspectors at six permanent and two roving stations who carried out 20,900

invasive mussel inspections. Fourteen of these were confirmed to be carrying the mussels. But that number was well down from the 52.000 2024 Watercraft inspections carried out by 64 inspectors at 12 Inspection Stations

pressing the federal government to provide funding to the province for more stations, longer operational hours and more inspectors, bringing B.C.'s Invasive Mussel Defence Program back to

In 2019, 22 watercraft coming into B.C. were

In reviewing these numbers, the OBWB has been

A provincial report released in May 2023 estimates Invasive mussel inspection stations in B.C. that an invasive mussel infestation in B.C. could cost between \$64 million and \$129 million per year. The estimated cost includes lost tourism, declining property values, increase in boat and marina maintenance, and ongoing maintenance of water-related infrastructure, such as municipal and agricultural water systems. And, as the report notes, this does not include the impact to the local fishery and the loss of a healthy aquatic ecosystem. The budget for this year's B.C. Invasive Mussel Defence Program is only \$3.3 mill., absent of any

2019 levels. The OBWB estimates that the cost to Photo: Contributed

federal funding and significantly less than the \$4 mill. OBWB and partners have been calling for. "If invasive mussels were to arrive in the Okanagan, it would impact everyone – whether or not you have any watercraft," said Jackson, noting the valley's beautiful sandy beaches would be transformed with the smell of decaying mussels and razor-sharp shells. Toxic algae blooms would impact swimming, aquatic life and drinking water quality. And taxes would likely go up to deal with maintenance of aquatic infrastructure.

"There's a reason why people live here and why others vacation here. For most of us, it's the

water. We want to make sure that the waters that attract us to this place are protected and are

here for future vacations and future generations," said Jackson. This year's Don't Move A Mussel campaign is urging the residents and tourists to "share memories, not mussels," and help preserve the Okanagan's precious waters. Learn more at DontMoveAMussel.ca.



Photo: Contributed Invasive mussel shells