

MEDIA RELEASE

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Shuswap organizations urge boaters and fishers to Clean, Drain, Dry and stop at watercraft inspection stations

May long weekend is upon us. For many in the Shuswap, that means our attention turns to the lakes and rivers, and a plethora of water-based activities: boating, canoeing, fishing, stand-up paddle boarding.

For two Shuswap-based organizations, it means it's time to turn up the heat on invasive species education and prevention efforts. The increased movement of boats and other types of watercraft into and around the Shuswap means that there's an increased risk of an accidental introduction of zebra and quagga mussels – a small freshwater mussel native to Europe that has tremendous destructive potential. The Shuswap Watershed Council and the Columbia Shuswap Invasive Species Society are working together to try to prevent just that from happening.

“Zebra and quagga mussels would create enormous problems in the Shuswap because they cling to, colonize, and encrust any hard surface under water: boats, dock pilings, water supply and irrigation systems – anything. Once they've established, it's difficult to get rid of them and they just keep coming back,” says Robyn Hooper, Executive Director of the Columbia Shuswap Invasive Species Society (CSISS).

Apparently, that's not all. “The mussels will litter beaches with their razor sharp shells. They produce foul odours, and they pollute water quality which puts the lake ecosystem at risk,” adds Erin Vieira, program manager for the Shuswap Watershed Council (SWC).

“The primary way the mussels would get to the Shuswap is by ‘hitch hiking’ on boats, fishing gear, or other watercraft such as canoes and stand-up paddleboards from other lakes where the mussels occur,” says Vieira. “We can keep them out, as long as we follow a couple preventative measures,” adds Vieira.

Hooper says the mussels aren't known to be established anywhere in BC, but they do occur in lakes in Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, and several states. “That means that anyone travelling into BC with a watercraft is considered higher risk, and they need to stop at a watercraft inspection station as they pass by. Government staff will inspect and decontaminate your watercraft, if needed, free of charge,” says Hooper. “Anyone moving a boat within BC should be cleaning, draining, and drying their boat every time they move from one waterbody to another. This is a really good practice to avoid moving a variety of invasive species, but not as rigorous as a mussel decontamination,” adds Hooper.

In 2017, the watercraft inspection program, which is run by the BC Conservation Officer service, intercepted 24 watercraft that were contaminated with invasive mussels. One of those was bound for the Shuswap/Thompson region, and seven for the Okanagan. “These numbers seem low, but they are scary. It

could take just one contaminated watercraft to establish zebra and quagga mussels in the Shuswap,” says Vieira.

Any suspected transport or possession of zebra and quagga mussels should be reported to the Provincial RAPP line at 1-877-952-7277. For more information about bringing a boat into BC, visit the provincial website <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/invasive-mussels/bringing-your-boat-to-bc>. For more information on zebra and quagga mussels, visit CSISS’ website at www.columbiashuswapinvasives.org/zebra-mussels/

Photos:

IMG_0710. Caption: Invasive mussels have encrusted this boat hull. Photo courtesy of Columbia Shuswap Invasive Species Society.

IMG_0731. Caption: Adult zebra and quagga mussels are approximately 3cm in length. Photo courtesy of Columbia Shuswap Invasive Species Society.

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