

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 including boating, fishing, canoeing, and stand-up paddleboarding.

For two Shuswap-based organizations, it means it's time to turn up the heat on invasive species 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, which are small freshwater mussels native to Europe with 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 been introduced to a lake, it's impossible to get rid of them for good," 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 and drinking water 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.

Watercraft inspection isn't required for travellers within BC. However, Shuswap residents can help raise awareness for the importance of inspection. "We encourage Shuswap residents to talk to their out-of-province friends and family that are bringing watercraft to BC," adds Vieira. "The more people know about Zebra and Quagga Mussels, and the importance of watercraft inspection, the less vulnerable we are to an infestation."

Watercraft owners also ought to clean, drain, and dry their watercraft 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,” says Vieira. “We can’t over-state the importance of watercraft inspection and decontamination.”

In 2018 the provincial watercraft inspection program, which is run by the BC Conservation Officer service, intercepted 25 mussel-fouled watercraft. “This number seems low, but it’s very scary. It will only take a single contaminated watercraft launching in the Shuswap to establish invasive mussels here,” says Hooper.

Both organizations recently shared their concerns with a parliamentary committee that’s reviewing the national Aquatic Invasive Species Program. “I think the committee heard loud and clear that British Columbians are especially concerned about Zebra and Quagga Mussels. The Shuswap Watershed Council and the Columbia Shuswap Invasive Species Society have asked for more action from the federal government to stop the spread of these mussels,” Vieira says.

“We’re thankful to MP Mel Arnold for initiating the review,” adds Hooper.

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>. For more information on zebra and quagga mussels, visit the SWC’s website at www.shuswapwater.ca.

Photos:

IMG_Watercraft_Insp_Ahead.png “Travellers into BC should watch for these signs, indicating watercraft inspection stations”

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The Shuswap Watershed Council is a watershed-based organization that works on water quality and safe recreation in the Shuswap. The Columbia Shuswap Invasive Species Society is a non-profit organization dedicated to the prevention, management, and reduction of invasive species in the Columbia Shuswap Regional District. The two organizations are working together to prevent an introduction of zebra and quagga mussels to the Shuswap.

Contact: For more information, please contact Erin Vieira c/o the Fraser Basin Council in Kamloops at 250 314-9660 or Robyn Hooper/Sue Davies at the Columbia Shuswap Invasive Species Society in Revelstoke at 1-855-785-9555.