

MEDIA RELEASE

27 June 2018 – for immediate release

Submitted by the Shuswap Watershed Council and the Columbia Shuswap Invasive Species Society

Working together to keep invasive mussels out of the Shuswap

Representatives of watershed and invasive species organizations along with concerned citizens met on Wednesday in Sicamous to discuss and learn more about the threat that zebra and quagga mussels pose to the Shuswap.

The two-hour public event was held at the Finlayson Street boat launch on Wednesday afternoon. Two Conservation Officers – part of the Province’s Invasive Mussel Defence Program – were on hand to speak about the issue and demonstrate how to decontaminate a mussel-fouled watercraft.

“BC has a strong tourism economy, and in this region the lakes are an important part of that,” said Maddy Laslett, Conservation Officer “If invasive zebra and quagga mussels are introduced here, it could cause devastation to our waters.”

“The mussels will greatly impact the lake environment, and our enjoyment of them,” explains Erin Vieira, Shuswap Watershed Council program manager. “These mussels can reproduce prolifically. They’re filter-feeders, which means they compete with fish and invertebrates for food. When they die, their small razor-sharp shells wash up on beaches, and they have a putrid smell while they’re decomposing. In other words our water quality, fish populations, and beaches are all at risk.”

Zebra and quagga mussels are unlike mussels native to BC. They’re much smaller – adults are the size of a finger-nail and juveniles are invisible to the naked eye. And, unlike native mussels, they cling to surfaces and colonize there. “That means that boats, dock pilings, water intakes, hydroelectric facilities – anything under water – is at risk of becoming covered or clogged with mussels,” says Sue Davies, of the Columbia Shuswap Invasive Species Society.

“It’s not possible to eradicate them,” Davies adds. “Our only option would be to try and manage the impacts and that would cost British Columbians at least 40-50 million dollars per year, and that doesn’t account for potential losses to the tourism industry.”

The Conservation Officers explained to the crowd at the event in Sicamous that all travellers with watercraft coming into BC are required to stop at one of twelve watercraft inspection stations that are set up around the perimeter of BC.

“This is an important prevention measure because we know that the primary way mussels move around is on watercraft of all kinds: boats, canoes, jet-skis, paddleboards,” says Vieira.

When a traveller pulls into an inspection station with their watercraft, a Conservation Officer will greet them and ask questions such as which waterbodies the watercraft has been in recently, and how long it’s been out of water. This allows the officer to determine if the watercraft has been in a high-risk area, and if there’s a chance that mussels could be on the watercraft.

High risk areas are provinces and states with known zebra and quagga mussel infestations, and include Manitoba, Ontario, California, Arizona, and Utah. The mussels are not known to be present anywhere in BC.

MP Mel Arnold spoke of how important this issue is on a federal level, and MLA Greg Kylo also showed his support for the efforts being made to prevent mussels entering BC.

Officer Laslett demonstrated how a watercraft would be decontaminated if it had come from a high risk area. The vessel on hand for the demonstration was generously provided by the Royal Canadian Marine Search & Rescue Station 106 Shuswap. Officer Laslett used a power-washer with water heated to 60°C and methodically sprayed the boat's hull and trailer. This procedure is typically done right at the inspection station, and there's no cost to the owner.

Officer Laslett also pointed out that standing water in a boat could be harbouring juvenile mussels. The risk is that when the boat launches, the standing water would mix with the lake water, releasing the juvenile mussels into the lake.

Marina staff attending the event were encouraged to participate in the new "InvasiveWise Marina Program". Danielle Toperczer of the Invasive Species Council of BC explained to the crowd that marinas can become InvasiveWise simply by educating their staff and clients about the dangers of invasive mussels and how to prevent their spread.

"There are two important things all watercraft owners need to do to prevent moving zebra and quagga mussels, or any other aquatic invasive species. #1: when you come into BC with your watercraft, stop at an inspection station. #2: when you move from one lake to another within BC, always Clean-Drain-Dry you watercraft," says Davies.

If your boat has been outside BC and you have not had your boat inspected please call 1 877-952-7277 before you launch! For more information visit the CSISS website:
<https://columbiashuswapinvasives.org/resources-for-boaters/>

- 30 -

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.