

EDITORIAL

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Prevent aquatic invasive species with these steps: Clean-Drain-Dry and stop for watercraft inspection

Invasive Species Action Month offers timely reminder for Shuswap boaters and watercraft users

Spring in the Shuswap has many thinking about lake cruises, paddling, fishing, and tow sports.

But May is also Invasive Species Action Month, and here in the Shuswap that means it's time to focus on aquatic invasive species prevention. The increased movement of boats and other watercraft into and around the Shuswap means there's an increased risk of moving aquatic invasive species.

The invasive species of utmost concern are Zebra and Quagga Mussels (ZQM) - two small species of freshwater mussels that originate in Europe. ZQM have invaded waters in the Great Lakes, Manitoba, and many watersheds in the US including as far west as California. Fortunately, ZQM have not invaded BC or our nearest neighbour Alberta. The Shuswap Watershed Council (SWC) and Columbia Shuswap Invasive Species Society (CSISS) are working together to educate the public about how to keep invasive mussels out of the Shuswap.

"The problem with ZQM is that they cling to and form colonies on objects under water: on boats and inside engine compartments, on dock pilings, inside water supply and irrigation pipes, and inside hydro-electric facilities - anything, really," says Erin Vieira, Program Manager for the SWC.

"This imposes costly, nuisance maintenance to rid these items of the colonies. And, it's impossible to get rid of them for good," Vieira adds. It's estimated that maintenance associated with ZQM would cost BC tax-payers \$43M per year.

That's not all. "The mussels will litter beaches with their razor-sharp shells when they die. They produce foul odours, and they pollute water quality which puts the lake ecosystem and drinking water at risk," Vieira says. Recent studies in the Great Lakes have linked invasive mussels to toxic algal blooms.

Clean-drain-dry + stop for watercraft inspection

"Boat and watercraft owners have an important part to play in preventing the spread of invasive mussels," says Sue Davies-McGill, Acting Executive Director of CSISS. "Invasive mussels invade new waterbodies by 'hitch hiking' on boats, fishing gear, and other watercraft including canoes and paddleboards."



Watercraft from outside BC could potentially be infested with invasive mussels. It could take just one infested watercraft launching into the Shuswap to start a new population of invasive mussels.

There are prevention measures that boat and watercraft owners need to follow.

“Clean, drain, and dry your watercraft every time you move it out of the water,” explains Davies-McGill. “By doing this, you’re greatly eliminating the chance that you’re moving invasive species.”

- Clean your boat or watercraft to remove mud, plant material, and other debris
- Drain all compartments onto dry land
- Ensure your watercraft is thoroughly dried before re-launching.

ZQM grow to about 1 centimeter in diameter and may be attached to watercraft or inside compartments or other hard-to-spot areas. Juvenile mussels are free-swimming and microscopic – impossible to detect with the human eye.

“Additionally, stop at watercraft inspection stations when you travel,” Davies-McGill adds. Highway-side inspection stations are set up at entry-points to BC staffed by the Conservation Officer service.

“All travellers with watercraft must stop. Watercraft will be inspected and, if necessary, decontaminated - free of charge,” says Davies-McGill. Watercraft inspection is mandatory, and failing to stop for inspection carries a heavy fine.

Watercraft inspection isn’t required when travelling within BC. However, Shuswap residents can help raise awareness for the importance of inspection.

“Talk to your out-of-province family and friends that plan to travel to the Shuswap with their watercraft,” says Vieira. “The more people that practice Clean-Drain-Dry and stop for watercraft inspection, the less vulnerable we are to an infestation.”

Clean-Drain-Dry and watercraft inspection apply to all kinds of watercraft: sport boats, fishing boats, kayaks, canoes, paddleboards, personal watercraft, and more.

These prevention measures will also slow down the spread of existing invasive species that occur in the Shuswap, including Eurasian water milfoil and invasive freshwater clams.

It isn’t only watersport enthusiasts who are asked to be on alert. Aquariums often contain a variety of species - for example, fish, plants, amphibians and molluscs - that are not native to BC. Aquarium contents should never be dumped down drains, into toilets, or released into the environment. Doing so can introduce non-native or invasive species into the environment.

Any suspected transport, possession, or sightings 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 or other watercraft



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.

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Photo: [IMG_Station.jpg](#). Travellers into British Columbia with a watercraft of any kind are required to stop for inspection, and decontamination if necessary, which is provided free of charge by the BC Conservation Officer Service.

Photo credit: BC Conservation Officer Service

About: The [Shuswap Watershed Council](#) is a watershed-based partnership 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 region.

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