

Welcome to the first status report for the 2024 season of the British Columbia (B.C.) Invasive Mussel Defense Program (IMDP) for the period of April 1 to August 14, 2024. The goal of the IMDP is to mitigate the risk of introducing zebra and quagga mussels into British Columbia.

Piloted in 2015, the program consists of three main components: watercraft inspections, lake monitoring, and public outreach and education. The program is delivered through the Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship in collaboration with the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy's Conservation Officer Service (COS).

The IMDP would like to recognize the ongoing funding provided by BC Hydro, the Columbia Power Corporation, Fortis BC, Columbia Basin Trust and the new contribution for the 2024 season from the BC Wildlife Federation, Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation and Pacific Salmon Foundation. The program would not be possible without these partnerships. For more information about the IMDP, please visit www.gov.bc.ca/invasivemussels. Suspected invasive mussels should be reported to the COS Report All Poachers and Polluters (RAPP) hotline at 1-877-952-7277.

Program Operations

For the 2024 season, 50 inspectors are operating six watercraft inspection stations and two roving inspection crews. The watercraft inspection stations are located at key border crossings along the Alberta and U.S. border, and include: Dawson Creek, Mt. Robson, Golden, Olsen, Yahk and Osoyoos.

The program continued to implement roving crews in the Lower Mainland and Penticton this season. The roving inspection crews support the program's capacity to respond to the high-risk watercraft notifications coming from other inspection stations in B.C. and other jurisdictions. New for this season the Program delivered training to federal Fisheries Officers in June. To date, the Lower Mainland roving crew has done four joint shifts with Fisheries Officers at key border crossings.

The initial COS Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) inspector training took place mid-March 2024 and a second round of training took place mid-May.

Several of the southern inspection stations opened on April 1, with additional inspection stations opening in mid-May. Most stations will be operational until mid October.

The program is supported by three field Sergeant's who supervise the AIS inspectors, operate the AIS K9 Unit and provide valuable enforcement capacity to address blow by's at the inspection stations. Enforcement capacity is also augmented by full time Conservation Officers located throughout the province.

Pull the plug! It's the law!

Effective May 17 2024 in B.C. it is now illegal to transport your watercraft with the drain plug still in place.

Before transporting a boat or other watercraft, owners/operators must remove the drain plug and drain all water on dry land including all internal compartments such as ballasts, bilges, and live wells.

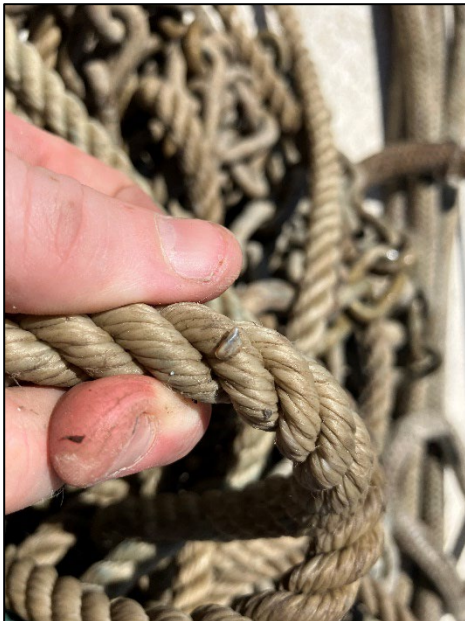
Why is this important?

While British Columbia (B.C.) currently remains free of invasive zebra and quagga mussels, Whirling Disease has now been detected in Yoho National Park in B.C.

To help stop the spread of whirling disease and invasive mussels before moving a boat or any equipment between water bodies, be sure to [Clean, Drain, Dry](#).

TOTAL WATERCRAFT INSPECTED	19,800
NUMBER OF PEOPLE INTERACTED WITH TO PROMOTE CLEAN, DRAIN, DRY	37,200
HIGH-RISK WATERCRAFT IDENTIFIED	159
DECONTAMINATION ORDERS ISSUED	52
QUARANTINE PERIODS ISSUED	31
MUSSEL-FOULED WATERCRAFT	8

**Statistics accurate as of August 14, 2024*



Invasive mussel found by the Lower Mainland crew during an inspection of sailboat from Lake Winnipeg. This illustrates just how small these invasive mussels are.

Watercraft Inspection Stations

As of August 14, 2024, crews completed 19,800 inspections and interacted with about 37,200 people to promote Clean, Drain, Dry practices – a preventative step all boaters should take when moving between lakes in B.C.

During the inspections, 159 watercraft were identified as high risk, 52 decontamination orders were issued, and 31 watercraft were given quarantine periods to meet the required drying time. To date, 100 decontaminations have been performed.

Of the 19,800 inspections, 8 watercraft were confirmed to have adult invasive mussels. These watercraft came from: Ontario (4), Arizona (2), Michigan (1), and Utah (1). The watercraft were destined for: the Thompson-Okanagan (4), South Coast/Lower Mainland (2), Omineca (1) and Kootenay Boundary (1). The IMDP received advanced notification on 5 of the 8 mussel-fouled boats, either from another jurisdiction or by the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA).

Lake Monitoring

The Province continues to partner with the Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation (HCTF) to administer grants to community organizations to support invasive mussel lake monitoring sample collection. The grants are funded by the Province and Fisheries and Oceans Canada. Grant applications for the 2024 season closed in early February and successful applicants were notified in the spring.

Lake monitoring is a critical step for early detection of invasive mussels. Sampling for invasive mussels is conducted following the [British Columbia Dreissenid Mussel Lake Monitoring Field Protocol](#). All samples are analyzed for the presence of invasive mussel larvae at a designated lab.

Sampling started in June for the 2024 season, and to date over 315 samples have been collected from 83 priority waterbodies across the province. All samples have tested negative for the presence of invasive mussels. There have been no reported introductions of live zebra or quagga mussels in B.C. waterways.

Highlights

In June 2024, the Program team (WLRS and BC COS) hosted a rapid response tabletop training exercise with our U.S. counterparts in the Columbia River Basin. The exercise was focused on response actions if invasive mussels were to be detected in a shared waterbody between B.C. and Montana. The lessons learned from the exercise will be shared in an after action report in the coming months. This will directly inform the update of the BC Invasive Mussel Early Detection Rapid Response Plan.

As wildfire broke out on July 22, 2024, Jasper National Park was put on evacuation order and Highway 16 was closed on both sides of the Alberta-BC border. With no watercraft traffic to monitor at the Mt. Robson AIS station, Auxiliary Conservation Officers spent the following day at the Kinbasket Lake boat launch providing information and outreach materials to approximately 50 resource users. They were then redeployed to assist Mt Robson Provincial Park staff. They spent the following seven days enforcing the evacuation area closure, supporting wildfire response efforts and redirecting those that were prohibited from entering the area. Their efforts were a valuable contribution in support of a challenging wildfire response.

Moss balls contaminated with zebra mussels were found in Washington State on August 5 2024. This follows the 2021 response when shipments of moss balls contaminated with zebra mussels triggered an international response that spanned 41 states and nine provinces including British Columbia (BC). As the importation of zebra and quagga mussels into Canada is federal jurisdiction, Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) is leading the current response. The Province is receiving regular updates from DFO and supporting as needed.

If you purchased a moss ball in person or online, please check for signs of zebra mussels or other organisms. Please report any findings to the RAPP line 1-877-952-RAPP (7277). Learn more about how to properly dispose of moss balls:
www.gov.bca.ca/invsivemussels



Top: AIS inspectors at the Golden station thoroughly inspecting and decontaminating a large pontoon boat.

Bottom: Zebra mussel found on a moss ball in B.C. during the 2021 response.

