
NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
2012FOR0224-002078
Dec. 20, 2012

Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations
Ministry of Environment

Protecting B.C. waters from aquatic invasive species

VICTORIA –The B.C. government has amended the controlled alien species regulation to protect our environment, with tough fines for those who introduce invasive species into local ecosystems.

The B.C. government has strengthened the regulation, acting on a previous commitment to ban the snakehead fish. All public comments received on the government’s policy paper supported strong action on this issue.

Main measures include:

- Prohibiting the possession, breeding, release or transportation of high-risk aquatic species such as the snakehead. Releasing a live snakehead into local waters could result in a fine of up to \$250,000.
- Requiring that no invasive zebra or quagga mussel, alive or dead, be present on boats or related equipment. Failure to clean mussels off boats or equipment could result in a fine of up to \$100,000.

Until now, the controlled alien species regulation has been used to control the possession, breeding, shipping and releasing of animals that are not native to B.C., such as tigers, that pose a serious risk to the health or safety of people. For example, currently it is a direct violation of the regulation under the Wildlife Act to possess a prohibited species without a permit.

Given the threats to B.C.’s fish, wildlife and habitat, the new rules target specific aquatic invasive species to prevent these live species from coming into contact with our waters. Many neighbouring Canadian and U.S. jurisdictions have similar restrictions on aquatic invasive species as those announced today.

Other new measures include:

- Adding definitions for “accredited zoo or aquarium,” “certified educational institution” and “certified research institution” to create clarity on standards, and allow exemptions to apply for strict educational or scientific purposes.
- Clarifying which species of monitor lizard are prohibited, typically those that grow over two metres in length or that otherwise create a significant threat to public safety.

Quotes:

Steve Thomson, Minister of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations –

“The strengthened regulation reaffirms our government’s commitment to protect B.C.’s natural ecosystems from exposure to unnecessary risk as a result of the release of invasive non-native species.”

Terry Lake, Minister of Environment –

“The impact of the snakehead and zebra mussel in other jurisdictions has been devastating to those local ecosystems. These regulations are an important step in preventing these invasive species gaining a foothold in B.C.”

Learn More:

- To learn more about controlled alien species regulation, visit: <http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/fw/wildlifeactreview/cas/>
- To learn more about the accreditation standards that have been developed by the Canadian Association of Zoos and Aquariums (CAZA), visit: http://www.caza.ca/en/about_caza/accreditation_program/
- To learn more about the certification process developed by the Canadian Council on Animal Care, visit: <http://www.ccac.ca/>

A backgrounder follows.

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BACKGROUND

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Northern Snakehead:

- The northern snakehead (*Channa argus*) is a highly invasive, predatory fish originally native to northern China and Korea that is capable of devastating local ecosystems.
- The fish is torpedo-shaped, light brown in colour with dark brown patches, and a large mouth filled with sharp teeth. It can grow up to 1.2 metres in length and weigh up to 6.8 kilograms.
- The snakehead can survive out of water in moist environments for up to seven days and is capable of travelling short distances overland.
- While not yet established in B.C., the fish is an ongoing ecological concern in a number of northeast U.S. states, as well as in Arkansas.
- In May 2012, a snakehead fish was spotted in Central Park lagoon in Burnaby. As a result, staff from both the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations launched an extensive search, and following a partial drainage of the lagoon, the snakehead was successfully captured and removed.

Zebra and Quagga mussels:

- Zebra mussels (*Dreissena polymorpha*) and quagga mussels (*Dreissena rostriformis bugensis*) were introduced to North America in the 1980s as a result of ballast water being discharged by vessels travelling from Europe.
- Both varieties of mussel pose a severe threat to B.C.'s aquatic ecosystems, salmon populations, hydro power generation stations and drinking water facilities. Live mussels that become attached to recreational vehicles, boats, boating equipment and fishing gear can be easily transferred from one body of water to another.
- Zebra mussels grow up to 15 millimetres in size and have a "D-shaped" shell. Their colour may vary from light brown to dark brown and the shell has obvious striping.
- Quagga mussels are rounder in shape and can grow up to 20 millimetres in size. The shell usually features dark, concentric rings, and is paler near its hinge.
- In addition to the Great Lakes, zebra and quagga mussels have been found in Quebec and at least 24 American states as far west as California and Colorado.
- Annual costs incurred in Ontario due to mussel contamination is estimated at \$75 million to \$91 million, with cumulative costs on the Great Lakes estimated at well over \$3 billion.

- Quagga mussel shells were found on a power boat that was brought to Shuswap Lake from Lake Pleasant, Arizona, in June 2012. The boat was subsequently removed by provincial and federal government staff (with the co-operation of the boat owner and the operator of the marina). Following an extensive decontamination effort and investigation, it was concluded that at this time there is no evidence that the mussel has become established in the system.

New penalties:

Following are the monetary penalties that will now apply to aquatic invasive species as a result of the new regulation:

Offence:

- Release or allow to be released live aquatic invasive species (AIS) or any mussel, dead or alive.

Penalty Amount:

- \$2,500 to \$250,000 on first conviction
- \$5,000 to \$500,000 on a subsequent conviction

Offence:

- Failing to comply with an officer's order to remove mussels from boats and equipment.

Penalty Amount:

- Up to \$100,000 on first conviction
- \$2,000 to \$200,000 on a subsequent conviction

Offence:

- Possess a prohibited AIS.
- Fail to prevent an AIS from breeding.
- Ship or transport a live AIS in B.C. and any mussel, dead or alive.
- Fail to safely dispose of water used to clean or remove mussels.

Penalty Amount:

- Up to \$50,000 on first conviction
- \$1,000 to \$100,000 on a subsequent conviction

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