



**For Immediate Release**

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**Invasive species website creates one-stop shop for Okanagan's agricultural sector**

Okanagan farmers, viticulturists, orchardists and ranchers have a new tool available to help manage invasive species. This digital 'one stop shop' features resources to assist producers in identifying invasive species, as well as management options and contact information for local experts. The **Okanagan Invasive Species Online** website ([www.oiso.ca](http://www.oiso.ca)) was officially launched at the Okanagan and Similkameen Invasive Species Society's AGM on June 13<sup>th</sup> in Penticton, BC.

Invasive plant and insect species create challenges for producers by interfering with cropping systems and creating health hazards for livestock. Freshwater invaders such as Zebra and Quagga Mussels, although not yet present in BC, can threaten irrigation infrastructure. While a range of human activities make management of invasive species an ongoing issue, climate change will further alter the dynamics of invasive and native species adding to management complexity and costs for producers.

"I think most of us do appreciate that the climate is changing," says Keith Manders, an Okanagan rancher and member of the project oversight committee. He points to the frequency of extreme weather events like flooding, drought and fire over the past few years as examples.

"I think these weather extremes are going to promote the growth of, and allow for the introduction of, species that we have not seen as the new conditions will provide the invaders with a welcoming environment," he says. "This tool puts all the information on local invasive species in one place that is easy and quick to access with our phones or computer."

Invasive species in the Okanagan are monitored and managed on a sub-regional basis by the three Okanagan Regional Districts, along with non-profit organizations such as the Okanagan and Similkameen Invasive Species Society (OASISS). This is the first time the Okanagan Valley will have a centralized system to share information pertaining to invasive species identification and management, and it is now available to producers and the public at [www.oiso.ca](http://www.oiso.ca).

The project was led by the Okanagan and Similkameen Invasive Species Society (OASISS), with federal and provincial government funding delivered through the BC Agriculture & Food Climate Action Initiative.

"Invasive species do not recognize jurisdictional boundaries so it made sense to collaborate with all three regional districts to unify our programs," states Lisa Scott, Executive Director with OASISS. "This new website is an exciting and unique tool that will help Okanagan producers get the information they need in a much more efficient way."

The site is designed for the agriculture sector, and allows producers to search by commodity, or by regional district to find species of concern. It also features an Ask an Expert function that allows users to fill out a form and be connected with an expert in their area who can assist with identification and treatment options.

The project was identified as a priority action under the *Okanagan Regional Adaptation Strategies* released by the BC Agriculture and Food Climate Action Initiative (CAI) in 2016, and funded as part of the \$300,000 investment to implement the strategy by the governments of Canada and British Columbia.

The BC Agriculture and Food Climate Action Initiative was established by the BC Agriculture Council in 2008 and is led by an advisory committee of agricultural producers, food processors and representatives from various government agencies. The Initiative has been supported by the Investment Agriculture Foundation of BC with funding provided by the governments of Canada and British Columbia.

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