

MEDIA RELEASE

December 17th 2024 - For immediate release

Shuswap watershed groups warn of whirling disease detection in Kootenay Lake, highlighting need for residents to be vigilant and prevent spread

The Shuswap Watershed Council (SWC) and the Columbia Shuswap Invasive Species Society (CSISS) are raising awareness about a recent new detection of whirling disease in Kootenay Lake. The [Government of BC issued a bulletin](#) on December 6th stating that three trout samples from the lake's southern arm have tested positive for the parasite that causes whirling disease in juvenile fish.

In infected waters, whirling disease may cause high mortality in salmonid fish (trout, salmon, and whitefish). It is caused by *Myxobolus cerebralis*, a microscopic parasite with a complex lifecycle that involves juvenile fish and aquatic worms as hosts. Damage to the brain stem and spinal cord results in the characteristic erratic 'whirling' swimming pattern of the infected fish. Juvenile fish are most susceptible to infection. There are no health risks for people or pets.

Prevention is Key

Whirling disease spreads through the movement of fish, mud, and water. It's transmitted by spores that cling to equipment such as boats and watercraft of all kinds, fishing gear, pumps, pets, and infected fish (dead or alive).

Preventing the movement of whirling disease is key, because there is no treatment. SWC and CSISS strongly urge all water users and recreationists to follow best practices to prevent the spread of this and other aquatic invasive species:

- **Clean, Drain Dry:** always clean, drain and dry boats, gear and equipment such as waders and lifejackets before moving them between waterbodies. Clean all mud, sand and plant material. Pull your watercraft's drain plug and drain water from all compartments. Dry items thoroughly, ideally for at least 24 hours.
- **Handle fish carefully:** never move fish or fish parts between waterbodies. Use fish-cleaning stations and dispose of fish waste in the garbage rather than in natural waterways.
- **Stop for watercraft inspection** when you travel with a boat or any kind of watercraft
- **Follow decontamination protocols.** The Government of BC has implemented additional cleaning and decontamination procedures when moving equipment and boats within or out of high-risk areas. The Columbia River Watershed has been identified as a high-risk area for whirling disease. The protocol can be found on the Government of BC website here:



[whirling_disease_decontamination_protocol_june_2024.pdf](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/environment/plants-animals-and-ecosystems/fish-fish-habitat/whirling-disease/whirling_disease_decontamination_protocol_june_2024.pdf)
(https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/environment/plants-animals-and-ecosystems/fish-fish-habitat/whirling-disease/whirling_disease_decontamination_protocol_june_2024.pdf).

In addition to best practices, residents are urged to report sightings of whirling disease to WhirlingDisease@gov.bc.ca or to a Conservation Officer via the RAPP line, 1-877-952-RAPP (7277).

Whirling disease was first confirmed in Canada in 2016 after it was detected in Alberta. In December 2023, the first presence of whirling disease was confirmed in British Columbia in Yoho National Park. The detection in Kootenay Lake is the newest confirmation of whirling disease in another waterbody in BC. More information can be found on the Government of BC website: [Whirling Disease - Province of British Columbia](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/plants-animals-ecosystems/fish/aquatic-species/aquatic-invasives/whirling-disease) (<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/plants-animals-ecosystems/fish/aquatic-species/aquatic-invasives/whirling-disease>).

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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.

Contact: For more information, please contact Erin Vieira at the Shuswap Watershed Council c/o the Fraser Basin Council in Kamloops at 250 314-9660.