

## Officials demand action on mussels

By Vernon Morning Star

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Senior governments are being told to flex some muscles when it comes to mussels.

The Okanagan Basin Water Board is demanding that the provincial and federal government initiate efforts to prevent the spread of the invasive zebra and quagga mussels.

"We need the federal and provincial governments to be serious about the issue," said Juliette Cunningham, a Vernon director, adding that OBWB and local communities can only do so much to prevent the arrival of the mussels which are from Europe originally and have spread across North America.

These mussels clog water intake pipes, pumps and boat motors.

They also deplete food sources for fish and produce toxins that kill fish and birds and contaminate drinking water.

There is also a recreational impact as the razor-sharp shells can spread across beaches.

It's believed it could cost \$43 million a year to manage the mussels if they arrive in the valley.

"It only takes one boat infested with the mussels, launching in our waters, to cause serious harm to our lakes," said Anna Warwick Sears, OBWB executive director.

Of concern to OBWB is a report that indicates that 19 per cent of the infected boats stopped in Idaho in the last five years were on their way to B.C. and Alberta.

"While the OBWB is thankful for the inspection efforts of Idaho and other western states, there is currently nothing in place for inspections at the Canada-U.S. border, or interprovincial borders such as B.C. and Alberta," said Warwick Sears.

"The federal government needs to pass the legislation that has been pending for several months now, making it possible for Canada Border Services Agency staff to stop boats from entering into Canada from the U.S. unless they've been inspected. As for B.C., it now has fines and jail time for importing the mussels, but no inspection stations to follow-up."

Mike Macnabb, a Regional District of North Okanagan director, says millions of dollars are being invested on the Duteau Creek water source partly because the mussels could make it difficult to get water from calcium rich Okanagan and Kalamalka lakes in the future.

"They don't grow up in Duteau," he said.

Cunningham hopes local MLAs and MPs will realize the threat the invasive mussels pose to the Okanagan Valley's environment, infrastructure and economy.

"We need them to come to the table," she said.

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