

Ottawa and Victoria called on for help in fighting mussels

The Okanagan Basin Water Board is calling on the provincial and federal governments to step in and act before an invasive form of mussel spreads to the Okanagan and damages the local water supply.

The water board says it is doing what it can to raise awareness and stop an infestation of invasive zebra and quagga mussels from reaching the Oka-

nagan, in part through its Don't Move a Mussel campaign (www.DontMoveAMussel.ca).

"If the mussels get into Okanagan waters they have potential to do significant damage to our beaches, fish, people's boats, tourism and municipal water systems," warned Doug Findlater, OBWB's board chairman and mayor of West Kelowna. "All levels of gov-

ernment need to work together to take action. It looks to me like provincial and federal officials are interested, but a comprehensive strategy is needed and we're running out of time. Every year that goes by is another year our lakes could get infected."

The board has been pushing for a stronger

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provincial and federal response since 2011. Research conducted for the OBWB notes the arrival of the mussels, originally from Europe, could cost the Okanagan more than \$43 million a year to manage. They are known to create toxic algae blooms, ruin beaches with sharp shells, destroy boat motors, foul water intakes and outfalls, put the ecology of the water at risk—including its fishery and more. And, there is no proven method to eradicate the mussels once they arrive.

"It only takes one boat infested with the mussels, launching in our waters, to cause serious harm to our lakes," said the OBWB's executive director Anna Warwick Sears. "We are extremely eager to address this issue, but we can't truly protect the Okanagan without the right laws in place and

participation from other levels of government."

The board pointed to a recent report from Idaho which found 19 per cent of the infected boats it stopped in the last five years were on their way to B.C. and Alberta. The OBWB says there is currently nothing in place for inspections at the Canada-U.S. border or inter-provincial borders to stop the spread. Currently, the mussels are in the Great Lakes of Quebec and Ontario and they were discovered in Manitoba in October. Okanagan waters are considered some of the most at risk in B.C.

"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 Canada from the U.S. unless they've been inspected," said Warwick Sears.