

Stop the invaders



By Cranbrook Daily Townsman

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A board that includes municipalities from the Okanagan is hoping that Cranbrook council will get behind their push to prevent invasive mussels from entering B.C.

At Monday's meeting, council authorized Mayor Wayne Stetski to send a letter reaffirming Cranbrook council's support for the 2013 Union of B.C. Municipalities resolution on invasive mussels.

"It's just reaffirming that we take those little creatures seriously," Stetski said.

The Okanagan Basin Water Board is concerned about invasive zebra and quagga mussels entering B.C. waters by way of uninspected boats coming from the U.S.

Currently there is no legislative requirement for Canada Border Services Agency to inspect boats for the invasive mussels.

Coun. Denise Pallesen worried that municipalities were getting behind too many resolutions separately, and wouldn't be taken seriously by the federal government.

"I would suggest that we maybe just leave it with UBCM," Pallesen said.

Stetski said she was right, it's not being taken seriously.

"That's why the Okanagan Water Board has requested all the municipalities to write separate letters, to make sure that they understand how important it is," he said.

The water board noted in the letter to council that the mussels could irrevocably harm the local environment, economy and way of life here in B.C.

"The mussels would impact every water intake, outfall, boat and dock in our lakes, and all other in-lake infrastructure," said Doug Findlater, chair of the Okanagan Water Board. "Our sense of urgency arises from a recent near-miss that exposed gaps in policy and preparation."

Findlater wrote that on March 12, a Canada Border Services Officer noticed visible mussels on the hull of a boat coming from southwestern U.S. The boat was on its way to be launched in the Okanagan.

The border officers worked with B.C. Conservation Officers to decontaminate the boat, after which it was released.

Findlater commended the border agent and conservation officers for working together to solve the problem at hand, but said the issue is that there is no federal legislation to prevent a mussel infested boat from being imported into Canada. The changes to make that happen have been pending for more than a year.

The border agent had not received any training about mussels, only information from a public outreach campaign in Osoyoos.

Coun. Sharon Cross said upon reading that story, she was reminded of a similar story from a couple years ago at the East Kootenay Invasive Plant Council AGM.

"They were explaining that there was an incident at the Roosville border where a boat got through and they ended up chasing it to Kootenay Lake and got it before it got in the water," she said. "There again it was just because someone was on alert."

Cross suggested that the issue should be raised at the Regional District meeting as well.

The water board noted that implementing a boat inspection program would be a fraction of the cost that dealing with a zebra or quagga mussel infestation would cost. Conservative estimates are \$20 million a year in B.C., though the water board puts the cost at more than \$40 million in the Okanagan alone.

"I respectfully request that the Government of Canada move quickly to pass the regulations prohibiting transport of invasive zebra and quagga mussels into Canada," said Findlater. "We further request that the Ministry of Fisheries and Oceans and the Ministry of Public Safety allocate funds, and enable, train, and equip Canada border agents to inspect boats for invasive aquatic species and prohibit their entry without decontamination of the watercraft."

Councillors Pallesen and Scott were opposed to the motion.

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