

Vernon and North Okanagan NEWS

Muscles flexed over mussels

by [Carmen Weld](#) | Story: 114201 - May 1, 2014 / 6:11 am



Photo: CTV

Vernon City Council is fed up with the lack of federal and provincial government concern over zebra and quagga mussels invading Okanagan lakes.

At their meeting on Monday fears were shared over a possible mussel invasion and frustration over their unanswered calls for help.

“It really scares me because our lakes are one of the biggest attractions that we have and we don't want to see anything disrupt that,” said Councillor Lord.

“Some of things I have found most disturbing in discussions with the regional district is how little action there has been provincially and federally,” added Councillor O'Keefe.

The Vernon City Council has decided to once again send letters to the federal and provincial government for help.

“Our whole economy, in many ways, depends on our lakes, so it is going to be really, really important that we will start to get some buy-in at the federal and provincial level and so I would also like to see you go see those people and impress our deep concerns to them,” said O'Keefe to Vernon Mayor Rob Sawatzky.

Sawatzky said he is angered by the lack of provincial and federal concern and is frustrated that they have to once again send this type of letter.

“We have done this in the past and the complete lack of a useful response is what is most outstanding,” said Sawatzky.

“It is a hugely important issue for our valley, for if nothing else, water intake and water supply, plus all of the occasions of recreational and other use. It could be a real “watershed” issue.”

Councillor Lord added that she fears the lakes will be ruined if we do not do something soon and that it will be similar to when milfoil changed the lakes forever.

“I think that the mussels present the same kind of threat to our lakes. It is a lot more important than we think, there are lakes in the United States now that have warning signs up saying to wear shoes because those mussels are so sharp, it is really scary.”

Along with the letter being sent to government agencies the City of Vernon plans to add a sample letter to [their website](#) encouraging other residents to send their own letters to the government. Letters from the City will add to a pile of letters already being sent from the Okanagan Basin Water Board and other jurisdictions to BC Premier Christy Clark, BC Minister of Environment Mary Polak, federal Minister of Fisheries and Oceans Gail Shea and federal Minister of Public Safety Steven Blaney.

The board says in their letter that the recent catch of a [mussels on a boat at the BC border](#) in Osoyoos heading for Okanagan Lake was a sign [something needs to be done](#), and fast. The letter includes a call for action for a 'Boat inspection program' which they claim would be a fraction of the cost of an actual zebra and quagga mussel infestation.

“The most conservative estimate is that an invasion would cost \$20 million per year in BC, but our own study puts the figure at more than \$40 million in the Okanagan alone,” states the letter from Doug Findlater, Chair of the Okanagan Basin Water Board.

The letter will also call for a completion of the BC governments aquatic invasive species control plan:

- increased training for Conservation Officers in the Southern Interior
- training and equipment for Canada Border Services Agents
- federal regulations prohibiting the transport of the invasive mussels into Canada
- investment in decontamination equipment