

OBWB turns up heat for senior governments to act on mussel threat

By [staff1](#) on June 11, 2014



Zebra mussels encrust a current meter retrieved from Lake Michigan. Mussels cover every imaginable surface in the water once they infest a waterway. They are spread by careless boaters, but Canada lacks federal regulations needed to stop them at the border. (U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration)

The Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) is turning up the heat in its effort to focus the attention of federal and provincial governments on the threat of invasive zebra and quagga mussels.

The OBWB has added a “Speak Out” link to its website at www.DontMoveAMussel.ca that automates the process of sending an email to provincial MLAs and federal MPs.

The board, which brings together local governments in the Okanagan to provide leadership on water issues, is concerned that neither senior government has adopted strategies that would help to stop the spread of these invasive species.

An invasion by these mussels would cost the Okanagan more than \$43 million a year just to manage, the OBWB says.

“We need the provincial and federal governments to step up to the plate,” said OBWB Chair Doug Findlater. “Zebra and quagga mussels are a triple threat to our well-being. They pose a significant environmental threat, a threat to our infrastructure, which we’ll all pay for with increased taxes, and an economic threat – to tourism and more.”

These mussels, originally from Eastern Europe, stimulate toxic algae blooms, litter beaches with sharp shells, clog boat motors, foul water intakes and outfalls, put fish and the ecology of local lakes

at risk and more, the OBWB says. There is no proven method to eradicate the mussels once they arrive that doesn't also cause significant environmental impacts.

The OBWB has been urging the federal government to adopt new regulations under the Fisheries Act that would empower Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) officers to stop and inspect boats coming into Canada. Consultations on those regulations concluded more than a year ago, and they are currently mired in federal bureaucracy.

The OBWB is also calling on the provincial government to bring in inspection stations, similar to U.S. programs that have self-funded boater-pay sticker systems. The province has estimated an effective inspection program would cost about \$2.4 million per year for 15 stations costing \$60,000 to \$160,000 each.

"We've done our research," said Findlater. "Boat inspections and the right legislation in place are key. It's impractical to be at each boat launch with so many private launch sites. But there are only so many roads into the province and these can be monitored much more easily."

Meanwhile, federal MP Alex Atamanenko wrote in May to Gail Shea, minister of fisheries and oceans, and Steven Blaney, minister of public safety and emergency preparedness. Atamanenko is the NDP MP for B.C. Southern Interior. Shea's department oversees the fisheries regulations that are currently pending, and Blaney's department oversees the CBSA.

"I urge the government in the strongest terms possible to move at all speed to implement regulations and to allocate funds that will equip Canada Border Agents with the skills and mechanisms necessary to keep our waters clear of these damaging mussels," Atamanenko said in his letter, which was copied to other area MPs and MLAs.

Many lakes and rivers in eastern North America and more recently the southwest United States have been contaminated with these mussels.

In March, a boat encrusted with quagga mussels was intercepted at the Osoyoos border crossing. CBSA officials convinced the driver to cooperate, but they lacked authority to impound the boat if the driver had refused.

To voice your concerns, visit www.DontMoveAMussel.ca and click on "[Speak Out](#)."

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Osoyoos Times



Quagga mussel. (Courtesy of the U.S. Geological Survey)