

PENTICTON HERALD

Local firm flexes its mussel

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Late last summer, after learning of the threat posed by invasive zebra and quagga mussels, Brynne Morrice set out to learn more and do what he could to protect Okanagan and B.C. waters.

A few short months later, the part-time Okanagan resident, part-time New York actor and filmmaker has released a short film, “Mussel Threat,” which premiered today during a news conference in Kelowna. The film illustrates just how dangerous the mussels are, and is a rallying cry for the protection of our beloved waters.

For Morrice, his interest in the mussels was sparked after noticing a Don’t Move a Mussel billboard – part of a campaign launched by the Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB)’s WaterWise program. And then, after reading stories in local media about the board’s frustration at the lack of significant action by senior levels of government after two years of sounding the alarm, Morrice decided to do something.

“I was at the lake swimming and thinking about it – about the risk to our lakes and beaches. It got to the point where I was literally losing sleep over it, thinking about how we’re gambling with the future of B.C. every day we don’t do something.”

In response, Morrice got in touch with the OBWB, gathered names of people to interview, started filming and then started a Kickstarter campaign last November to raise funds to help with the costs of the project.

After hitting his goal within three days, and with support for the project continuing to grow, Morrice promised an even better film with the additional funding. Within a month, Morrice raised over \$5,000. As a result, his research had him speaking with people fighting mussels in New York and Pennsylvania, Colorado, California and more. His filming started in the Okanagan, but took him to the Kootenays and into Arizona – a state on the front lines of the mussel-fight.

As for why he was able to raise the needed funds so quickly, Morrice believes “It’s because this is something that lives in people’s hearts. It’s not about mussels. It’s about our lakes and rivers. It’s because those living in B.C., who understand the issue, are willing to fight to protect what we have.”

On March 31, the province announced \$1.3 million in funding to help protect B.C. from the mussels, which will include three roving inspection stations to stop and inspect boats coming into the province. While initially Morrice was happy to hear the B.C. government was taking greater action, he said it’s not good enough and makes the release of his film all the more

important. “It’s like putting up a fence with holes in it. It needs to be an unbroken wall of defence. All it takes is one infested boat to destroy our waters.”

Indeed, Morrice had no problems finding people willing to talk about the mussels and their concerns. For its part, the OBWB was pleased to see Morrice take the issue on and participate in the film, noted Vice-Chair Juliette Cunningham.

“Brynne has chosen a creative medium to articulate the significant impacts the quagga and zebra mussels would have on B.C.’s freshwater lakes and rivers. I believe once viewers have experienced this film they will be inspired to become engaged in this very critical issue,” she said.

Heather Larratt, an Okanagan-based aquatic biologist was also interviewed. It was Larratt’s work for the OBWB that determined the cost of a mussel infestation in the Okanagan would be \$43 million to just manage. Her main reason for getting involved in the film – the hope that it would help get the message out to a broader audience.

The Kelowna Chamber of Commerce has also been speaking out, pushing the province and federal government for action. They too were happy to participate.

“We feel this issue could be the most catastrophic event that could impact the economy if it goes unchecked,” explained Caroline Grover, the chamber’s Chief Executive Officer. “The chamber also recognizes the recent announcement made by the province, but we’re not done. We can’t stand back and think the work is complete.

“We hope that the film will increase awareness and that the province moves to full-time patrols at our borders.”

“We’re all in this boat together,” added ‘Quagga D’ Davis. As an avid boater, and a watercraft inspection and decontamination training contractor with the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission, Davis has seen the devastating impact created by quagga mussels in Lake Mead.

“From my perspective, it’s only the agencies that are working collaboratively on this issue that are having any success. It’s my hope that the Okanagan and B.C can learn from the Lake Mead experience and act before it’s too late.”

That’s exactly what Morrice wants. “My hope is that we have created a film that people will want to watch and share, that will create awareness and push people to call for action, and ultimately a swift, assertive government response.”