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hostile MUSSELS



A new documentary raises concerns about the destructive nature of invasive mussel species if allowed to access B.C. waterways. It's an issue the Okanagan Basin Water Board says needs more action from government. See story A3.

CONTRIBUTED

Trustees face hard budget cut decisions

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Central Okanagan school board trustees are pondering several recommendations to make up for a \$1.5 million shortfall in education funding in its 2015 budget, including increasing the amount parents pay to bus their kids to school.

The school board's finance committee heard several cost saving moves from school superintendent Hugh Gloster on Wednesday

night as the district tries to balance its budget by increasing some revenue streams and decreasing expenses.

The recommendations at this point are just that, as the school board's finance committee will meet again next Wednesday for debate before the entire school board decides on what recommendations to follow at its April 29 board meeting.

"I think it's going to be difficult," said finance committee chair Lee Mossman.

"It's not going to be an easy thing to do and we'll try to mitigate the impact to students first and foremost."

When it comes to transportation, it's being recommended to increase the cost for busing from \$10 to \$20 per month (\$200 per year) a move the district first made in 2009 but then cut in half in subsequent years.

However, putting it back to the \$20 per

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Close-Up

Documentary cites invasive mussel warning

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Imagine if we all woke up tomorrow and the forests of B.C. had been killed off and turned into a vast desert.

That's what a Vernon filmmaker says could happen to our lakes and rivers in a heart-beat should the invasive zebra and quagga mussels arrive in B.C. and infest our waterways.

Brynne Morrice, an actor and filmmaker who splits his time between New York and Vernon, has released a six-minute documentary called *Mussel Threat*, spotlighting the potential dangers of the invasive mussels on B.C. water systems.

The \$5,000 project was funded through a Kickstarter campaign and released in Kelowna on Wednesday at a press conference held jointly by Morrice and the Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB).

"These mussels, when they get into a lake or river, they basically turn it into an aquatic desert," said Morrice via Skype from New York.

"If tomorrow, we woke up in B.C. and all of our beautiful green, lush forests had turned into deserts, that would be a pretty catastrophic change to our province.

"You have to think of these mussels like that. They turn the water into aquatic deserts.

"There is nothing left except these mussels. The communities that have experienced this...there is no going back.

"We would be facing a new status quo that we would never heal from and B.C. would be a far less wonderful



A Vernon actor and filmmaker has made a short documentary called *Mussel Threat* which outlines the potential devastating impact on our lakes and rivers if invaded by the destructive zebra and quagga mussels.

place to live and a far less wonderful place to visit."

For the past six months, Morrice, 30, traveled to areas of North America that have suffered from infestations of zebra and quagga mussels.

The mussels have been found in Lake Winnipeg, in North Dakota and as close as Nevada, just a day and a half drive to the B.C. border. They can survive outside of water for 10 days or in wet carpet or the bilge area of a boat for up to 30 days.

Morrice says it wouldn't take much for a boat to pass through the border, into B.C. and zebra and quagga mussels would be infesting a local lake, devastating the ecosystem, eating up the plants, killing off native species and polluting the water with the associated algae blooms.

In fact it's nearly happened in our region already. In 2012, a boat

launched into Shuswap Lake with quagga mussels attached to it. Luckily they were dead and did not infest the lake.

Then last March, a boat infested by the quagga mussels was stopped at a border crossing at Osoyoos, heading for B.C. waters.

"People who really understand, who really get this, are up in arms," said Morrice.

"This is a major issue. This is going to affect the entire province in a profound way.

"Our communities in B.C. are built on lakes and rivers and this could be devastating if we had an infestation."

A graduate of W.L. Seaton High School in Vernon, Brynne Morrice was a typical Okanagan resident growing up.

His grandmother had a cabin on Shuswap Lake, one of B.C.'s

great vacation lakes. He spent his youth fishing, swimming and boating around the Okanagan.

As an actor and filmmaker, he has spent the past decade trying to break into the film world, beginning at the Kelowna Actors Studio, progressing to acting school and now to work as an actor in New York, where he spends parts of his year while also spending time back in the Okanagan.

During one visit home last year, he read a newspaper article detailing the fight of the OBWB against zebra and quagga mussels.

"When I read that newspaper article explaining the frustrations of a group like the Okanagan Basin Water Board, I saw a need for a project like this," he said of his movie.

"After two years of raising alarms there

wasn't any assertive protective measures being taken on our borders to protect us from the mussels. Having grown up in the valley, what we have here is pretty important, and I was quite honestly frightened about the possibility, and as I looked into it more and more I became even more worried."

With just 20 bucks in his wallet, Morrice approached the OBWB with an idea for a documentary, allowing him to get in touch with experts to interview for the project.

He took the idea for the film to the online community using Kickstarter, the web-based funding source which solicits donations from the public.

Within three days, he had raised \$2,000 and within 30 days that increased to \$5,000.

He then traveled to

places in the U.S. that are dealing with the devastating effects of an infestation of the mussels.

He saw first-hand what kind of deadly effect they have on lakes and rivers.

He talked to people in B.C. who are pushing government to expand its detection policies and increase security at the border with Alberta and at the Canada-US border between B.C. and Washington.

What he came away with was enough information for a much larger feature. But he pared it down to six minutes in the hopes more people would see it and hear the message.

"I hope it reaches the people who haven't heard about this before and to the people who have heard about this, I hope it gives them a really clear understanding of what we are talking about," Morrice said.

"That this is just not a minor little change to our environment that no one will notice. This is a catastrophic upheaval in our fresh water that will affect everybody.

"I can say that with confidence having spent six months researching this. Ultimately, I hope the government will really step up and do the maximum. Right now I think they are doing the minimum."

When it comes to government regulations, enforcement and funding to deal with the invasive mussels (as well as other invasive species), there is some movement from government to try and deal with the issues.

Earlier this month, the provincial government announced a two-year \$1.3 million program that would fund roaming teams to inspect and decontaminate boats identified as a concern either at the Canada-US border or boats coming into B.C. from Alberta.

Last December, the federal government announced new invasive species legislation that would make it illegal to bring an invasive species over the border.

However, that legislation has yet to make it into law as another boating season begins. It's a complex issue with multiple jurisdictions including provinces, the federal government, several US states, a group known as the Pacific Northwest Economic Region and local governments all working towards a solution to the increasing problem of invasive species.

SEE WARNING A9

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close-up

OBWB: Mussel detection efforts still fall short

WARNING FROM A3

Kelowna-Mission MLA Steve Thomson says government is trying to be proactive on the issue.

"We think we have responded with a significant investment," he said.

"This new funding will allow us to build capacity, experience and additional partnerships to expand the program in the future.

"It's part of a perimeter strategy that we continue to develop. I think everyone is nervous (about zebra and

quagga mussels). That's why there has been a real effort on the part of local governments and others like the Okanagan Basin Water Board to look to the province to put additional resources into the program.

"We recognize this is a foundation to build longer-term funding for a sustainable program because the risks will continue to be there."

While the wait is on for the new federal legislation to come into place giving more tools for action against boaters who bring invasive species into B.C., the new roaming teams as well

as information such as highway signs will be in place this year.

For the OBWB, the reaction of government on this issue is still not enough.

"I think we are still in a position to make sure we are never dealing with what has happened in other areas where the mussels have gone through," said Juliette Cunningham, OBWB vice-chair.

"I think sometimes people think we are exaggerating the issue and I think that's unfortunate. When the province announced they were putting \$1.3 million over two years, we

certainly didn't feel that was adequate. That's not what we asked for.

"We are asking our borders be manned with the equipment and the training required to make sure (the mussels) never come into our province.

"The OBWB feels very strongly that the reaction from government is not strong enough."

You can find out much more on zebra and quagga mussels online at dontmoveamussel.ca Find Morrice's documentary at <https://vimeo.com/125057151>.

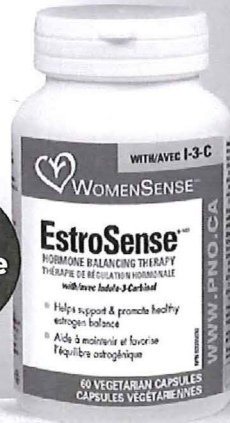
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