

Board flexes its mussels

by [Darren Handschuh](#) | Story: 141497 - Jun 5, 2015 / 5:00 am

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The [Okanagan Basin Water Board](#) has given notice it will not be responsible for “for the long-term treatment, mitigation or control of zebra or quagga mussels if the province fails to enact appropriate prevention measures” to keep the invasive species out of area lakes.

With June being Invasive Species Action Month, the board released a position statement on the issue.

“Awareness is great, but action is better,” said board chairman Doug Findlater.

“The water board is doing all it can within its mandate to prevent the spread of these species into the Okanagan,” he added, noting the launch of the [Don't Move a Mussel](#) campaign, efforts to help local communities prepare, and an ongoing push on those with greater authority to do more.

“Ultimately, it is up to senior levels of government to bring in the appropriate laws and enforce them,” Findlater said.

The board issued a [seven-point position statement](#) on the invasive zebra and quagga mussels.

According to a staff report, there are lessons to be learned from the 45 years the water board has been conducting invasive milfoil control in the Okanagan. Over its lifetime, the program has cost Okanagan taxpayers more than \$10 million, while the province has contributed less than \$8 million, and none in the last 15 years.

At the same time, research for the water board suggests the cost of a mussel invasion in the Okanagan could be \$43 million a year in direct costs, lost revenue and property values, added maintenance of aquatic infrastructure, and irreparable ecological damage.

“In light of the cost of the milfoil program, the OBWB believes the province must accept the costly responsibilities for mitigation and control of this invasive species, which we’ve been warning against since 2012, and not pass them to our local property taxpayers,” said Findlater.

The federal government is also being called upon to complete the process of empowering Canada Border Services agents to stop and inspect all incoming watercraft.

B.C. is among only a few provinces and U.S. states that are still considered mussel-free, including Alberta, Saskatchewan, Washington, Idaho, Montana, Oregon and Wyoming.

It is illegal to transport zebra and quagga mussels in B.C. – dead or alive – and doing so carries a \$100,000 fine.

“The legislation is there; now we need the enforcement, said Findlater. “We’ve made progress, but it’s frustrating. There is a strong case for permanent inspection stations, and it seems every other province and state gets that. Now we need the province of B.C. to amp it up.”