

Hon. Mary Polak, Minister of Environment
Room 112, Parliament Buildings
Victoria, B.C. V8V 1X4

Hon. Michael de Jong, Minister of Finance
Room 153, Parliament Buildings
Victoria, B.C. V8V 1X4

Hon. Steve Thomson, Minister of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations
Room 248, Parliament Buildings
Victoria, B.C. V8V 1X4

May 24, 2016

Re: Need to expand invasive mussel inspection station hours and mandate inspections for all watercraft entering B.C.

Dear Minister Polak, Minister de Jong and Minister Thomson,

As we shared in our April 28 letter, the Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) was very pleased with the Premier's March 31st announcement of the additional actions to prevent the spread of invasive mussels into B.C. for the 2016 boating season. As we noted then, "the additional information gathering and sharing that this system allows will help to further improve future water protection efforts." In just the first month of inspections, the numbers show that 5% of intercepted watercraft were deemed to be high-risk, with four infested boats intercepted as of May 3rd. This is despite the many neighbouring jurisdictions with inspection stations between infested areas and B.C.

The OBWB is concerned that the limited 10 hour/day inspection stations are likely to miss a large number of watercraft entering the province. Although the stations are setup to catch the highest volumes of traffic, it will only take one infested boat to introduce the mussels to our waters. Further, it is our understanding that when a vehicle fails to stop at an inspection station, auxiliary Conservation Officers are not empowered to pursue and enforce an inspection on the vehicle's owner. This scenario has occurred recently in both Elko, B.C., and at an Idaho station, where fortunately in both cases a law enforcement officer was present and able to pursue the vehicles, both of which were towing infested watercraft.

In light of the information gathered through this program to date, we ask you to extend the hours of the provincial inspection stations, including hiring more C.O.s, both auxiliary and full-time as needed for the extended hours. At a minimum, we believe the stations should be open throughout daylight hours. For comparison, Idaho runs inspection stations 7am to

7pm, 7 days per week, while requiring all watercraft entering state waters to purchase an Invasive Species Sticker. This year, Alberta's high-risk stations on the eastern border are running 16 hours per day, 7 days per week.

We also recognize that current legislation only requires watercraft to be inspected when they travel past an open inspection station. We believe that all watercraft entering B.C. should be required to report to an inspection centre, prior to entering B.C. waters. Partnerships with First Nations, provincial, regional or municipal staff, local marina operators, invasive species councils, and other industries could help provide enhanced inspection capacity within the province, while notifying provincial decontamination crews in the case of high-risk boats.

We have also called on the federal government, through the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness to ensure that all watercraft crossing the federal border be inspected at all points of entry throughout the Prairie and Pacific Canadian Border Services Agency Regions, and that the federal government provide funding to B.C. and the other western provinces to aid in prevention efforts.

The OBWB will continue to advocate for more resources for prevention efforts in B.C. while continuing to work toward increasing public awareness of the threat of invasive mussels. We commend the outstanding work of the Ministry of Environment staff, and the Conservation Officers involved in this program to date. We also believe that even more resources are warranted given the clear threat the province is facing.

Sincerely,



Doug Findlater, Chair
Okanagan Basin Water Board

CC:

- Okanagan MPs: Stephen Fuhr, Dan Albas, Mel Arnold, Richard Cannings;
- Okanagan MLAs: Hon. Christy Clark, Hon. Steve Thomson, Hon. Norm Letnick, Eric Foster, Dan Ashton, Linda Larson, Jackie Tegart, Greg Kylo;
- Regional District Chairs for North Okanagan, Central Okanagan, and Okanagan-Similkameen Regional Districts;
- Okanagan Municipalities: Enderby, Armstrong, Spallumcheen, Vernon, Coldstream, Lake Country, Kelowna, West Kelowna, Peachland, Summerland, Penticton, Oliver, Osoyoos;
- Chiefs Executive Council, Okanagan Nation Alliance;
- Matt Morrison, Chief Executive Officer, Pacific NorthWest Economic Region;
- Gail Wallin, Executive Director, Invasive Species Council of B.C.