

Funding to protect B.C. lakes from invasive mussels in the offing?

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Premier Christy Clark hinted that the province may be stepping up its efforts to keep invasive mussels from B.C. lakes this summer.

The issue was brought up during a Kelowna Chamber of Commerce meeting, when Clark was asked what her government intended to do to protect area waterways from Zebra and Quagga Mussels.

"Last year we had roving patrols and we learned a lot...I ask that you stay tuned on this one. We should be ready for the new boating season when it comes," Clark said to the crowd.

The Okanagan Water Basin Board has been asking that roving inspection patrols turn into permanent inspection check points and they may be getting their wish. Correspondence between the water-minded organization and the government indicate ministry staff see the benefit of permanent inspection sites, at the very least.

In a letter addressed to Minister of Finance Michael de Jong and Minister of Environment Mary Polak, Chair of the Okanagan Basin Water Board Doug Findlater offers support for a province initiative aimed at stopping the spread of mussels.

"The Okanagan Basin Water Board wishes to express strong support for the Ministry of Environment's proposed plan as presented at the Mussel Prevention Leadership Forum Dec. 18, 2015, to establish eight full-time, mandatory inspection stations to prevent the spread of invasive mussels into B.C." reads the letter.

"We are pleased to see that the plan builds on information gathered throughout the 2015 boating season by the B.C. Conservation Officer's Service and Ministry of Environment."

The implementation of permanent stations would bring B.C.'s inspection regime up to the level of the most effective and efficient systems in North America.

Findlater said that the cost of not blocking invasive mussels from area waterways could be devastating.

"A recent estimate from the Pacific NorthWest Economic Region suggests it could cost over \$500 million per year to the economy of the Pacific Northwest."

Findlater went on to say they have also called on the federal government to provide funding and resources to the province to support their efforts, "recognizing that their recent commitment to infrastructure improvement faces a significant challenge should invasive mussels be introduced to hydro, agricultural and water supply systems in B.C."

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