

EDITORIAL: Mussel funding requires certainty

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There was a lot of back slapping Wednesday as Premier Christy Clark and MLA Eric Foster announced an extra \$2 million to try and prevent quagga and zebra mussels from arriving in Okanagan lakes.

And obviously the initiative is a positive step forward as the invasive species could have a significant social and economic impact on the region just as it has elsewhere in North America.

However, there should be some concern about the long-term integrity of the provincial initiative since none of the \$2 million is actually coming from government coffers.

The cash is coming from B.C. Hydro, FortisBC, Columbia Power and the Columbia Basin Trust, and while Victoria has some control over B.C. Hydro as a Crown corporation, it's unlikely the private utilities can be forced to maintain funding levels in the future.

"We have to make sure that the funding continues and I'm not sure the external funders will want to do that," said Juliette Cunningham, a Vernon councillor and Okanagan Basin Water Board director.

Similar comments are also coming from Doug Findlater, OBWB chairperson.

"External agency funding partnerships are great, but they don't last forever," he said.

Given that the mussels have spread across the continent like wildfire and could cost the Okanagan \$43 million annually in lost revenue, added maintenance of aquatic infrastructure and irreparable ecological damage, there is a need for the provincial government to establish firm, core funding for a permanent defence program at B.C.'s borders.

When heading into battle, half-measures just won't do.

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