

Stable mussel funds sought

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Victoria is under pressure to ensure efforts to stop mussels don't collapse.

The Okanagan Basin Water Board will write the provincial government demanding that there is long-term, permanent funding for border stations inspecting boats for quagga and zebra mussels.

"We want stable funding to establish this as a core program," said chairperson Doug Findlater at OBWB's meeting in Coldstream Tuesday.

The provincial government recently announced an extra \$2 million for eight permanent inspection stations along B.C. borders to try and stop the arrival of invasive mussels.

The money is coming from B.C. Hydro, FortisBC, Columbia Power and the Columbia Basin Trust.

There is a concern that any of the agencies could withdraw funding beyond 2016 and the monitoring activities could be impacted.

"The good news is the province came up with funding but they used everybody else's money," said director Toby Pike.

The government is contributing in-kind support through staff, equipment and office space.

"Are they taking it seriously if they think \$250,000 in-kind is enough?" said director Cindy Fortin.

In the last few years, OBWB has launched a \$600,000 awareness campaign about mussels through its budget and external resources.

"The province has not done public education of this type," said Anna Warwick Sears, OBWB executive director.

Among the inspections stations will be one in Penticton and that has raised concerns within Osoyoos, which is right on the U.S. border.

"There is already evidence of border guards finding boats with mussels," said Sue McKortoff, OBWB director and Osoyoos mayor.

"It's a huge border for boats and to have someone coming down from Penticton out of their work day is missing the boat."

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