

February 20, 2017

NEWS RELEASE

WITH B.C. BUDGET ANNOUNCEMENT ON THE WAY – OKANAGAN PUSHES PROVINCE TO MAKE INVASIVE MUSSELS A PRIORITY

Kelowna, B.C. – As the Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) watches the fall-out of the discovery of invasive mussels in Montana, only a few hours' drive from B.C., and with news that the B.C. Government is getting ready to announce its latest budget, the board is calling on the province to include proper mussel prevention funding.

The call comes in a letter sent to B.C.'s Minister of Environment Mary Polak, and cc'ed to Premier Christy Clark, Finance Minister Mike DeJong and others, by the OBWB's new chair Tracy Gray. "We urge you to immediately allocate permanent, sufficient funding for an expanded inspection and decontamination program, starting with this year's provincial budget," states Gray. "Prevention now will be far more cost-effective than dealing with a wide spread infestation." (Please find full letter attached.)

In addition to funding, the letter provides a number of other recommendations, including:

- Legislative changes to require all watercraft entering B.C. to report to an inspection station, prior to launching in provincial waters;
- That invasive infestations be added as a specified hazard under B.C.'s Emergency Program Management Regulation (EPMR). Currently the EPMR lists some agricultural pests as a specified hazard. The OBWB suggests that invasive mussels be included. And that the province's Early Detection Rapid Response plan be recognized as a multi-agency hazard plan under Emergency Management B.C., ensuring appropriate supports are available to immediately contain infested water bodies. And,
- That B.C. enhance its monitoring network to ensure that any infestation is identified as soon as possible, allowing the best chance of immediately quarantining a water body and preventing the further spread.

"The zebra and quagga mussel issue is a top priority for me and the rest of the Water Board and I intend to passionately advocate with senior government on this file, and keep the pressure on," said Gray, who was elected chair at the Feb. 7 OBWB board meeting. "In the case of the province, we need assurances that there is ongoing funding for mussel prevention and defence, should an infestation occur." In 2016, the eight provincial inspection stations were funded through BC Hydro, FortisBC, Columbia Power and Columbia Basin Trust. Although the OBWB welcomed news of this funding, it has consistently recommended an ongoing core funding model to ensure stability of the mussel defence program.

"Time is not our friend in this, and all it takes is one infested watercraft to put our drinking water, our fisheries, our economy, beaches and more, at risk. We don't want to say 'We knew this was a concern and we should have done more.' We need to do as much as possible now, so our kids and grandkids have the same opportunity to walk on our beaches in bare feet like we have," added Gray.

The OBWB sent a similar [letter to the federal government in December](#), urging funding and supports to address the invasive mussel issue.

Gray said the OBWB and its Okanagan WaterWise program remains committed to doing its part on the issue, for example with its "[Don't Move A Mussel](#)" (DMM) public outreach campaign. Since DMM launched in 2013, it has delivered a campaign valued at over \$650,000, thanks in part to generous support from local media and other business partners.

An extensive 2013 [study](#) conducted for the OBWB estimated that zebra or quagga mussels could cost at least \$43 million each year to the Okanagan alone, in lost revenue, added maintenance of aquatic infrastructure and irreparable ecological damage. The Pacific Northwest Economic Region, made up of provincial and state government representatives in the Pacific Northwest and with a mission to increase economic well-being and quality of life for all citizens in the region, has estimated a mussel infestation at [\\$500 million](#) a year to the Pacific NW.

“As snowbirds look to return home, we urge Okanagan residents to ‘Have The Talk’ with their returning friends and family,” added Gray. “If they’re coming back from an area that is mussel-infested, they should be following the Clean-Drain-Dry protocol to help protect our waters.”

For more information on the mussels, risks to the Okanagan, how to ‘Have the Talk,’ Clean-Drain-Dry and other prevention tips, visit [DontMoveAMussel.ca](#).

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

Ref: 299335

February 17, 2017

Re: Need to expand invasive mussel prevention and preparedness efforts in British Columbia

Dear Minister Polak,

On behalf of the Okanagan Basin Water Board, I am writing to express our ongoing concern about the increasing threat posed by invasive zebra and quagga mussels to the fresh waters of B.C. In November 2016, the effort to prevent an infestation of invasive mussels became even more critical, as Montana announced the first occurrence of the species in their waters. They are now only a few hours' drive from our provincial waters.

We reiterate our call for legislative changes to require all watercraft entering our province to report to an inspection station, prior to launching in B.C. waters. Such legislation could create efficiencies in the inspection regime, while increasing awareness of invasive mussels and existing legislation which makes them illegal to possess in B.C.

We also call for invasive infestations to be added as a specified hazard under B.C.'s Emergency Program Management Regulation (EPMR) and that the province's Early Detection Rapid Response plan be recognized as a multi-agency hazard plan under Emergency Management B.C. Currently the EPMR lists some infestations by agricultural pests as a specified hazard; the same could be done for invasive mussels. Upon discovery of invasive mussels in Montana, that state's Governor declared a natural resource emergency, and provided supports to immediately contain the infested water bodies. Appropriate resources must be in place in advance to contain an infestation in provincial waters, should invasive mussels arrive.

The Montana experience also identified gaps in existing resources, such as available labs to test water samples to determine the extent of the infestation. B.C. must enhance its monitoring network to ensure that any infestation is identified as soon as possible, allowing the best chance of immediately quarantining a water body, and preventing further threats. As we've seen in other North American jurisdictions where an infestation has occurred, these mussels would affect drinking water intakes, hydroelectric facilities, agricultural irrigation systems, sewer outfalls, bridges, docks, retaining walls, and many other freshwater related systems

throughout the province. The introduction of invasive mussels would also have significant negative impacts on fisheries, where the Okanagan Nation has worked hard and over many years to bring back the local fishery. Tourism and recreation are also key to our economy – these sectors would also be at risk.

Finally, we call on the province to expand watercraft inspection station hours and dates of operation. Each year, we see the reports of provincial success through the inspection program, and we recognize the significant advancement of this program in the last few years, particularly through the funding of other organizations, such as BC Hydro, Fortis BC, Columbia Power and the Columbia Basin Trust. However, it ultimately will not matter how many boats are intercepted in a 10 hour period, if potentially infested boats move undetected for the remaining 14 hours of the day. We urge you to immediately allocate permanent, sufficient funding for an expanded inspection and decontamination program, starting with this year's provincial budget. Prevention now will be far more cost-effective than dealing with a wide spread infestation.

The Okanagan Basin Water Board has also advocated for the federal government to provide funds and other resources to the province in this effort, and to increase its inspection activities through the Canadian Border Services Agency. We have also run the [Don't Move A Mussel](#) public outreach and education initiative since 2013, with a total campaign value of over \$650,000, thanks in part to generous support from local media and other business partners. We will continue to be a strong and active partner with the province in the effort to keep our waters clean and healthy, and our economy strong.

Sincerely,



Tracy Gray, Chair
Okanagan Basin Water Board

CC:

- Hon. Michael de Jong, Minister of Finance
- Hon. Steve Thomson, Minister of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations
- Okanagan MPs: Stephen Fuhr, Dan Albas, Mel Arnold, Richard Cannings;
- Okanagan MLAs: Hon. Christy Clark, 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.