



News

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Water Board Calls For Urgent Help From Higher Levels of Government

“It only takes one boat infested with the mussels, launching in our waters, to cause serious harm to our lakes.”

That's the concern that The Okanagan Basin Water Board's Executive Director Anna Warwick Sears and others are voicing with spring right around the corner. Research conducted for the OBWB notes the arrival of the mussels, originally from Europe, could cost the Okanagan more than \$43 million a year to just manage. They are known to create toxic algae blooms, ruin beaches with sharp shells, destroy boat motors, foul water intakes and outfalls, put the ecology of the water at risk – including its fishery, and more. And, there is no proven method to eradicate the mussels once they arrive.

The group is calling on the provincial and federal governments to get involved, saying they need support if they are to prevent a dangerous infestation of invasive zebra and quagga mussels from taking place.

And time is of the essence.

“We are extremely eager to address this issue, but we can't truly protect the Okanagan without the right laws in place and participation from other levels of government,” cautioned Warwick Sears. “The federal government needs to pass the legislation that has been pending for several months now, making it possible for Canada Border Services Agency staff to stop boats from entering into Canada from the U.S. unless they've been inspected.

“As for B.C., it now has fines and jail time for importing the mussels, but no inspection stations to follow-up,” added Warwick Sears. “The province has said each inspection station would cost \$60,000 to \$160,000 per year, but all of B.C. could be protected by siting these stations at a few major points of entry. Prevention is going to cost a lot less than dealing with it once it's here.”



The board has been pushing for a stronger provincial and federal response to the threat of the invasive mussels since 2011. Directors asked staff to meet with the Okanagan MLA and MP caucus with recommendations; to send new letters to the province and federal government, urging ministers responsible to pass the pending federal legislation, as well as ensure appropriate funding is in place to do an effective job.