

Control efforts gain muscle



By Vernon Morning Star

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After two years of calls to the province and federal government to help prevent invasive zebra and quagga mussels from being brought into the valley, the Okanagan Basin Water Board is ramping up efforts.

The local agency responsible for providing leadership on water issues has launched a Speak Out initiative, inviting residents to go to www.DontMoveAMussel.ca and write to their MLA and their MP and urge action.

"We need the provincial and federal governments to step up to the plate. Zebra and quagga mussels are a triple threat to our well-being," explained OBWB chairperson Doug Findlater.

"They pose a significant environmental threat, a threat to our infrastructure which we'll all pay for with increased taxes, and an economic threat to tourism and more."

Research conducted for the OBWB notes that an invasion of these mussels, originally from Europe, could cost the Okanagan more than \$43 million a year to just manage.

They are known to stimulate toxic algae blooms, litter beaches with sharp shells, clog boat motors, foul water intakes and outfalls, put fish and the ecology of our lakes at risk, and more.

There is no proven method to eradicate the mussels once they arrive that doesn't also cause significant environmental impacts.

The agency launched the Don't Move a Mussel campaign last summer to inform residents of the threat these mussels pose, and to support efforts by water stewardship groups to encourage boaters and those with other watercrafts to "Clean, Drain, Dry." their equipment.

At the same time, the OBWB has been calling on the federal government to pass pending legislation allowing Canada Border Services agents to stop and inspect boats coming into Canada, and urging the province to bring in inspection stations – similar to U.S. programs that have self-funded boater-pay sticker programs. The province has estimated an effective inspection program would be about \$2.4 million per year (15 stations at a cost of \$60,000-\$160,000 each per year).

“We’ve done our research, boat inspections stations and the right legislation in place are key,” said Findlater.

“It’s impractical to be at each boat launch with so many private launch sites. But, there are only so many roads into the province and these can be monitored much more easily. This effort to encourage residents to join us in our call for action comes from valley citizens themselves who have been asking ‘What can we do?’

“This is urgent. We can win if we can get senior government to act now,” said Findlater.

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