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\$1.3M to fight mussels

by Wayne Moore | Story: 136505 - Mar 31, 2015 / 11:38 am

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Photo: Jennifer Zielinski - Castanet

The provincial government will spend about \$1.3 million in its fight against invasive quagga and zebra mussels.

The program is designed to protect provincial lakes and rivers against the threat of the mussels which, according to Environment Minister Mary Polak, could threaten aquatic life and cost billions in maintenance costs.

The program, announced Tuesday in Kelowna, consists of:

- Three mobile decontamination units
- Six trained auxiliary conservation officers

- Highway signage throughout the province
- Expanded monitoring for zebra and quagga mussels
- Report all poachers or polluters response line coverage
- Increasing "Clean, Drain, Dry" education and outreach programs

West Kelowna Mayor Doug Findlater, who serves as chair of the Okanagan Basin Water Board, said while the announcement is a big step forward, it is not what the board was lobbying for.

"We were looking for inspection stations at all of the major roadways into British Columbia," said Findlater.

"This program doesn't go that far, but it certainly is an enhanced level of detection than they had before, and we are pleased with that. We are going to continue to monitor and see how this program is."

Findlater said the province will be reporting out on what they find.

He said if they start finding boats coming into the province with the invasive mussel, then the program will have to be enhanced.

"Every year, (the mussels) are not here saves local governments tons of money because if they get here, you know who is going to bear the cost of the maintenance on the water, sewer systems, the docks and marinas. It will be local government, it won't be the provincial government."

One boat was caught coming into B.C. last year with the invasive mussel, and about three years ago some boats got to Shuswap Lake, but the mussels were dead.

Findlater said six boats were found with the mussels heading into the Calgary area last year.

"It shows this is a real problem."

Polak said she believes the investment of \$1.3 million is enough to significantly build capacity.

She added if the province was not working in conjunction with other provinces and states there is every likelihood we would see an infestation in our waterways.

"The big cost is if these mussels ever establish themselves in British Columbia; then you are looking at potentially catastrophic costs for agencies like BC Hydro and also for agriculture," said Polak.

She said those costs would be in the billions of dollars.