

## Position Statement

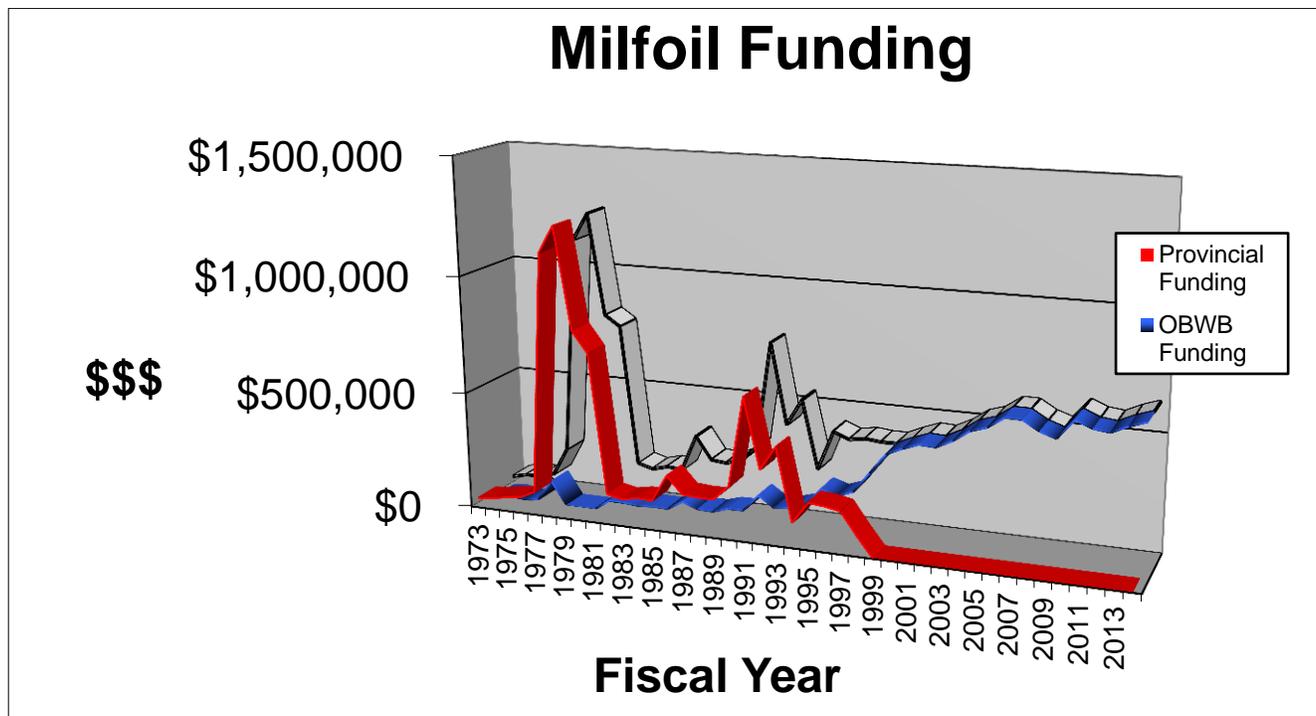
As approved (with amendments) by the board May 5, 2015

Date: May 7, 2015

Subject: **Zebra and quagga mussels**

### Learning from the Past

Since its inception, the Okanagan Basin Water Board has played a critical role in Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) prevention and control in the Okanagan. One of the original responsibilities for OBWB was to provide milfoil control for the basin, in partnership with the Ministry of Environment. Files from those early days show that the program was involved both in public outreach and education, as well as in experimentation for the best methods to control or eradicate the weed. After 40 years, the aim of the milfoil control program has become management of annual milfoil growth in important public use areas such as beaches, boat launches and marinas. The failure to prevent or eradicate the milfoil infestation led to the hybridization of invasive milfoil with native milfoil, and has made the Okanagan a source of invasions for other areas. Over its lifetime, the program has cost Okanagan taxpayers over \$10 million, while the province has contributed less than \$8 million, and none in the last 15 years.



### A New Threat

Today the Okanagan is faced with a new AIS threat from zebra and quagga mussels. Where milfoil has largely been an expensive, controllable nuisance, a zebra or quagga mussel infestation threatens our environment, economy and way of life. Massive gains that have been made in water quality improvements, fish habitat restoration, infrastructure and irrigation, are all under threat. The annual financial impact is estimated to be over \$43 million per year in the Okanagan. The cost to our environment and way of life is immeasurable. This is not hyperbole. This scenario has played out across watersheds throughout North America, where ecosystems and local economies have been drastically altered by these invaders.

### A Simple Solution

While the threat is great, the actions to prevent an invasion are simple, and close at hand. There are a total of 16 main highway entrances into the province of B.C. from the south and east, and 11 are currently monitored by the Canadian Border Services Agency (CBSA), leaving only five main entrance points from Alberta. In December 2014, the federal government announced new regulations which would empower the CBSA to stop and inspect all boats coming into the province for AIS. The protocol for inspection is standardized across the Pacific Northwest, and would be simply a matter of training agents to inspect. Upon finding an infested vessel, the CBSA could issue a decontamination order and notify the province which could direct the decontamination process. These regulations are expected to be fully approved in May or June 2015.

Once the federal regulations are in place, only the remaining five main interprovincial border crossings would need monitoring by the province. In March 2015, the province announced empowerment, funding and all resources for three “roving” inspection stations with crews. This commitment already represents 60% of what is needed to cover the entire Alberta - B.C. border. With the announcement came a two-year commitment of \$575,000 per year to run the program. This is approximately the same amount as it currently costs to run the annual milfoil control program in the Okanagan alone, which beg the questions:

- Is this a sufficient investment to provide action for the entire province? And
- How can such a small amount be justified when we know that control for a much less damaging invasive costs this amount annually in a single region?

It is apparent that with a small extra allocation of resources, and a redistribution of the current resources, the province can provide for the effective, long-term prevention of zebra and quagga mussels into B.C. The province has the massive advantage of being able to follow the programs of other jurisdictions which have years of experience in funding and running these prevention and outreach programs. There is no reason to “reinvent the wheel” and waste extra resources. They can simply copy State models, or hybridize those models to quickly come up with the appropriate model for B.C.

### The Role of the OBWB

While AIS prevention is clearly the responsibility of the province, the milfoil program has shown that there is no appetite at the provincial level for long-term control and management of these species once they are established. The position of the province is that once these species are introduced and cannot be eradicated, the responsibility falls on the local government to provide control and mitigation. There is no way to eradicate an infestation of these species. If they get here, local governments and local taxpayers will be on the financial hook.

For the last several years, the OBWB has taken an advocacy and public education role on this issue, requesting specific action from the provincial and federal government. To this point, OBWB efforts have

grown organically, reacting to new information, while staff learned about the issues and the many organizations involved in prevention throughout the Pacific Northwest. With the clear state of efforts at each level of government, the OBWB has an opportunity to refine its message, and define its strategic role in prevention and in control or containment efforts, should prevention fail.

**Be it resolved that:**

1. The OBWB calls on the federal government to finish the process of empowering the CBSA for mussel prevention, and to require that each boat crossing into B.C. through a federal border crossing be submitted to the Uniform Minimum Protocols and Standards for Watercraft Interception Programs for Dreissenid Mussels.
2. The OBWB calls on the provincial government to increase the number of inspection and decontamination stations to five, and in conjunction with the CBSA, provide permanent, mandatory inspection stations at each main border crossing into the province from the south and east.
3. The OBWB will not accept responsibility for the long-term treatment, mitigation or control of zebra or quagga mussels if the province fails to enact appropriate prevention measures, and consequently the species are introduced.
4. The OBWB's WaterWise program will continue to provide public outreach and education through its Don't Move A Mussel initiative, and will continue to collaborate with the provincial and regional mussel prevention frameworks to ensure consistent messaging and efficient use of resources.
5. The OBWB will liaise with the provincial AIS specialist to provide training to local agencies, including the commercial marine industry, towards identifying and decontaminating any suspected infested vessels.
6. The OBWB will continue to coordinate with the Okanagan and Similkameen Invasive Species Society to identify gaps for further action.
7. The OBWB will seek meetings with appropriate Ministers through local governments at the 2015 UBCM convention.