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Central Okanagan posted June 7, 2015 by Stacy Penner

Okanagan Water Board Refuses Responsibility for Mussel Control

The Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) is calling on the province to take action against invasive mussels.

In response to the provincial government’s declaration of June as Invasive Species Action Month, the OBWB released a Position Statement on the mussels. “Awareness is great, but action is better,” said OBWB Chair Doug Findlater.

“The Water Board is doing all it can within its mandate to prevent the spread of these species into the Okanagan,” he said, noting actions like the launch of the [Don’t Move a Mussel campaign](#), efforts to help local communities prepare, and an ongoing push on those with greater authority to do more. “Ultimately, it is up to senior levels of government to bring in the appropriate laws and enforce them.”



Photo Credit: KelownaNow.com

As a result, the OBWB has issued a [seven-point Position Statement](#) on invasive zebra and quagga mussels. One of the points is that 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.”

OBWB says invasive milfoil control for the Okanagan has been ongoing for 45 years, costing taxpayers over \$10 million. A staff report states that the provincial government has contributed less than \$8 million, with no money in the last 15 years.



Mussels on Lake Mead boat prop. (Photo Credit: "[Mussel Threat](#)"/Brynne Morrice)

Now, research for the OBWB shows the a mussel invasion in the Okanagan could be at least \$43 million every year in direct costs, lost revenues and property values, added maintenance of aquatic infrastructure, and irreparable ecological damage.

“In light of the cost of the milfoil program, the OBWB believes the province must accept the costly responsibilities for mitigation and control of this invasive species which we’ve been warning against since 2012, and not pass them to our local property taxpayers,” said Findlater.



BC's Aquatic Invasive Species Coordinator Matthias Herborg demonstrates decontamination procedures. (Photo Credit: KelownaNow.com)

The board is calling for permanent inspection stations in the province along the B.C.—Alberta border. On the May long weekend, a two mussel-infested boats were stopped in Alberta, one from Vancouver. This boat was apparently originally purchased in the mussel-infested Arizona four years ago and is believed to be on dry land since.

“We’ve made progress but it’s frustrating,” said Findlater. “There is a strong case for permanent inspection stations, and it seems every other province and state gets that. Now we need the Province of B.C. to amp it up.”



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