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NEWS RELEASE

OKANAGAN WATER BOARD WELCOMES PROVINCIAL EFFORT TO PROTECT BC FROM INVASIVE MUSSELS

Kelowna, B.C. – The Okanagan Basin Water Board applauds the Province of B.C. and several partners who have come forward to help establish the inspection stations it has been pushing for since 2012 to help prevent the spread of invasive zebra and quagga mussels into B.C. waters.

Today, the province announced a \$2 million program for the 2016 boating season to have five mandatory, inspection stations set up at key crossings along the B.C.-Alberta border and three along the B.C.-Washington border, stopping boats and other watercraft. The program is being funded thanks to \$1.2 million from BC Hydro, and \$250,000 each from Fortis BC, Columbia Power and Columbia Basin Trust. The province is also providing \$250,000 in-kind in staff time, office space and equipment.

“It’s a massive step forward,” said a pleased Doug Findlater, Chair of the OBWB. “When coupled with the perimeter defence of other provinces and states, this gives us much better protection than we’ve had in the past.”

The stations will be located at Golden, Valemount, and Dawson Creek, as well as Cranbrook (with the ability to set up in Sparwood, Roosville or at the Paterson border crossing), Invermere (with ability to set up in Windermere and Radium Hot Springs), Nelson (covering also additional key locations in the area), Penticton (covering also Midway, Osoyoos and Kaleden), and the Lower Mainland (covering Sumas, Aldergrove and weigh scales in Hope). Inspections will be conducted starting April 1 to October, during the busiest time of year for water recreation.

In addition to the stations, funding has been used to hire and train 20 additional Auxiliary Conservation Officers as aquatic invasive species inspectors (up from 12 in 2015 for 32 in total). Funding will also go to the purchase of 6 new mobile decontamination units (to add to the two purchased by the province last year), ensuring each station is equipped with a unit. As well, there will be increased mussel monitoring, highway signage, outreach and a permanent Invasive Mussel Coordinator position at the province.

“We appreciate the stations, the staffing, signage and decontamination units,” continued Findlater, adding a note of caution. “External agency funding partnerships are great, but they don’t last forever. We hope the province makes this a permanent mussel defence program and commits to ongoing core funding.”

In the meantime, the OBWB and its Okanagan WaterWise program will continue its outreach and education efforts through its [Don't Move A Mussel](http://www.DontMoveAMussel.ca) initiative (www.DontMoveAMussel.ca) and provide support to partner agencies such as the Province of B.C., the Invasive Species Council of BC and its affiliates, including the Okanagan and Similkameen Invasive Species Society.

“We all have a responsibility to become educated and spread the message. If you have neighbours who boat, kayak, paddle board, fish, talk with them,” Findlater stressed.

The Water Board is also talking with federal officials to push for more to be done, including possible inspection stations at National Parks, similar to what is set up in Manitoba, following the discovery of the mussels there in October 2013.

An extensive [study](#) conducted for the OBWB in 2013 estimated that zebra or quagga mussels could cost at least \$43 million each year to the Okanagan alone, in lost revenue, added maintenance of aquatic infrastructure and irreparable ecological damage.

The Pacific NorthWest Economic Region recently released an estimated cost of \$500 million a year to the Pacific Northwest.

Last year's provincial inspection results found 36% of high-risk boats (the largest portion) entering the province were headed to the Okanagan, and 51% to the Southern Interior.

The OBWB acknowledges the support of the Kelowna Chamber of Commerce and its affiliates, as well as local governments through the Southern Interior Local Government Association and the Union of BC Municipalities, and the many other agencies and individuals who joined the Water Board in its call for greater protection of B.C. waters.

"As far as we know, B.C. is still mussel-free and we want to keep it that way," Findlater concluded.

For more information on the mussels, and the risks and expected impacts to the Okanagan, please visit www.DontMoveAMussel.ca.

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