

June 10, 2016

NEWS RELEASE

INSPECTION STATS SHOW STRONGER MUSSEL DEFENCE NEEDED, SAYS OKANAGAN WATER BOARD

Kelowna, B.C. – Provincial mussel inspection stations only opened April 1, but already the stats show the need for a stronger program says the Okanagan Basin Water Board. As such, the OBWB has sent letters to the Province of B.C. and federal government, calling for increased enforcement.

According to the province, as of June 6, their five stations along the B.C.-Alberta border, and three along the B.C.-Washington border have inspected 3,200 watercraft, of which 124 were identified as high-risk for invasive mussels. Of these 124, six were transporting adult invasive mussels and 16 were quarantined to meet the required 30-day drying time. Of the six carrying mussels, there's a strong chance that they were alive, says government staff.

"We've been calling for action since 2012, concerned that we were at risk for an infestation of zebra and/or quagga mussels. But these stats demonstrate this is a real possibility," said OBWB Chair Doug Findlater. "Remember, one mussel can reproduce a million. It only takes one to devastate our lakes, our drinking water, tourism, fishery, beaches and economy."

Specifically, the OBWB is recommending the Province expand inspection station hours from 10 hours/day, seven days a week, to at least daylight hours and hire more Conservation Officers (auxiliaries and full-status COs) as needed for the extended hours. In May, a driver hauling a boat failed to stop at an inspection station near Elko, B.C. and the auxiliary on site was not empowered to pursue the vehicle. Fortunately a law enforcement officer was present to chase the person down. The boat was found to be carrying invasive mussels and was decontaminated. More fully-empowered COs would help address this issue.

Also, the board suggests the province revise its legislation to require all watercraft entering B.C. to report to an inspection centre prior to launching in provincial waters. Currently legislation only requires watercraft to be inspected when they travel past an open inspection station.

"We commend the outstanding work of the Ministry of Environment staff, and the Conservation Officers involved in this program to date. We also believe that even more resources are warranted given the clear threat the province is facing," the letter states. The letter was sent to B.C.'s Minister of Environment Mary Polak, Minister of Finance Mike de Jong, and Minister of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations Steve Thomson.

A separate letter was also sent to federal Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Ralph Goodale, and to the attention of Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) President Linda Lizotte-MacPherson, and CBSA's Regional Director General Rosalyn MacVicar for Pacific Region and Kim Scoville for Prairie Region.

"We remain highly concerned that not all points of entry (POEs) place the same priority on stopping a potential infestation of invasive mussels. As stated in (Min. Goodale's) correspondence, currently Border Service Officers have only received mussel inspection training at 'several high-risk' points of entry," the letter states.

"We call on all POE Chiefs of Operations to require mandatory enforcement of the (federal government's) Aquatic Invasive Species regulations through the use of the Uniform Minimum Protocols for Watercraft Interception Programs."

In the vast majority of cases, explained Findlater, this would simply require a standard interview to find out, for example, where the watercraft has been and how long it has been out of water, and then a short visual inspection to determine if it's at risk of carrying the mussels.

"The legislation is in place, but it needs to be enforced," he added.

In addition, the OBWB is calling on the federal government to provide funding to the prairie provinces and B.C. to help contain the current infestations in Manitoba's Lake Winnipeg and Cedar Lake, and prevent the mussels from spreading to Saskatchewan, Alberta and B.C. The U.S. federal government recently provided \$4 million in matching prevention funds to its northwestern states. The OBWB is calling on the Government of Canada to match or exceed that commitment to the provinces.

"We've definitely seen movement on this issue from the Province and the feds, but we're also seeing that more needs to be done, and done now," Findlater said.

The OBWB chair acknowledged this week's announcement of a joint Western Canada Invasive Species Agreement, between B.C., Alberta, Yukon, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, formalizing their coordination efforts. "It's a good move," he said.

"We continue to be concerned that B.C. is operating its inspection stations based on funding from BC Hydro, Fortis BC, Columbia Power and Columbia Basin Trust," Findlater added. "While we are thankful that these agencies stepped forward for 2016, there is no clear plan for future years. We need the province to commit to ongoing core funding, ensuring the stability of this important program."

For its part, the OBWB and its Okanagan WaterWise program has relaunched its spring/summer Don't Move A Mussel initiative, raising awareness regarding the mussels and doing outreach, and is providing support to partner agencies, including the Okanagan and Similkameen Invasive Species Society, to do the same.

An extensive 2013 study conducted for the OBWB 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 estimates a 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. Looking at these stats, Findlater noted it's in everyone's interest to help 'Spread the message. Not the mussel.'

"If you have neighbours or family members who boat, kayak, paddle board, or fish, talk with them," added Findlater. "As far as we know, we remain mussel-free and we all need to help keep it that way."

For more information on the mussels, the risks to the Okanagan, and prevention tips, visit www.DontMoveAMussel.ca.

Hon. Mary Polak, Minister of Environment
Room 112, Parliament Buildings
Victoria, B.C. V8V 1X4

Hon. Michael de Jong, Minister of Finance
Room 153, Parliament Buildings
Victoria, B.C. V8V 1X4

Hon. Steve Thomson, Minister of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations
Room 248, Parliament Buildings
Victoria, B.C. V8V 1X4

May 24, 2016

Re: Need to expand invasive mussel inspection station hours and mandate inspections for all watercraft entering B.C.

Dear Minister Polak, Minister de Jong and Minister Thomson,

As we shared in our April 28 letter, the Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) was very pleased with the Premier's March 31st announcement of the additional actions to prevent the spread of invasive mussels into B.C. for the 2016 boating season. As we noted then, "the additional information gathering and sharing that this system allows will help to further improve future water protection efforts." In just the first month of inspections, the numbers show that 5% of intercepted watercraft were deemed to be high-risk, with four infested boats intercepted as of May 3rd. This is despite the many neighbouring jurisdictions with inspection stations between infested areas and B.C.

The OBWB is concerned that the limited 10 hour/day inspection stations are likely to miss a large number of watercraft entering the province. Although the stations are setup to catch the highest volumes of traffic, it will only take one infested boat to introduce the mussels to our waters. Further, it is our understanding that when a vehicle fails to stop at an inspection station, auxiliary Conservation Officers are not empowered to pursue and enforce an inspection on the vehicle's owner. This scenario has occurred recently in both Elko, B.C., and at an Idaho station, where fortunately in both cases a law enforcement officer was present and able to pursue the vehicles, both of which were towing infested watercraft.

In light of the information gathered through this program to date, we ask you to extend the hours of the provincial inspection stations, including hiring more C.O.s, both auxiliary and full-time as needed for the extended hours. At a minimum, we believe the stations should be open throughout daylight hours. For comparison, Idaho runs inspection stations 7am to

7pm, 7 days per week, while requiring all watercraft entering state waters to purchase an Invasive Species Sticker. This year, Alberta's high-risk stations on the eastern border are running 16 hours per day, 7 days per week.

We also recognize that current legislation only requires watercraft to be inspected when they travel past an open inspection station. We believe that all watercraft entering B.C. should be required to report to an inspection centre, prior to entering B.C. waters. Partnerships with First Nations, provincial, regional or municipal staff, local marina operators, invasive species councils, and other industries could help provide enhanced inspection capacity within the province, while notifying provincial decontamination crews in the case of high-risk boats.

We have also called on the federal government, through the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness to ensure that all watercraft crossing the federal border be inspected at all points of entry throughout the Prairie and Pacific Canadian Border Services Agency Regions, and that the federal government provide funding to B.C. and the other western provinces to aid in prevention efforts.

The OBWB will continue to advocate for more resources for prevention efforts in B.C. while continuing to work toward increasing public awareness of the threat of invasive mussels. We commend the outstanding work of the Ministry of Environment staff, and the Conservation Officers involved in this program to date. We also believe that even more resources are warranted given the clear threat the province is facing.

Sincerely,



Doug Findlater, Chair
Okanagan Basin Water Board

CC:

- Okanagan MPs: Stephen Fuhr, Dan Albas, Mel Arnold, Richard Cannings;
- Okanagan MLAs: Hon. Christy Clark, Hon. Steve Thomson, Hon. Norm Letnick, Eric Foster, Dan Ashton, Linda Larson, Jackie Tegart, Greg Kylo;
- Regional District Chairs for North Okanagan, Central Okanagan, and Okanagan-Similkameen Regional Districts;
- Okanagan Municipalities: Enderby, Armstrong, Spallumcheen, Vernon, Coldstream, Lake Country, Kelowna, West Kelowna, Peachland, Summerland, Penticton, Oliver, Osoyoos;
- Chiefs Executive Council, Okanagan Nation Alliance;
- Matt Morrison, Chief Executive Officer, Pacific NorthWest Economic Region;
- Gail Wallin, Executive Director, Invasive Species Council of B.C.

Hon. Ralph Goodale, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness

Linda Lizotte-MacPherson
President of CBSA

Roslyn H. MacVicar
Regional Director General, CBSA, Pacific Region

Kim R. Scoville
Regional Director General, CBSA, Prairie Region

May 24, 2016

Re: Urgent need to prevent invasive mussels from entering Pacific Northwest

Dear Minister Goodale,

Thank you for your April 07 reply to our January 11 letter regarding the urgent need to prevent invasive mussels from entering the Pacific Northwest. Since April 1st, the British Columbia Conservation Officer Service has been providing inter-provincial inspections for boats coming from across Canada, which in some cases, have originated in the United States. Between April 1st and May 3rd, 1,225 boats were inspected, 64 of which were deemed to be “high-risk,” and four of which were found to be carrying invasive mussels. These stations do not operate 24 hours a day.

While we acknowledge the significant action taken by CBSA in cooperating with the B.C. Ministry of Environment, we remain highly concerned that not all points of entry (POEs) place the same priority on stopping a potential infestation of invasive mussels. As stated in your correspondence, currently Border Service Officers have only received mussel inspection training at “several high-risk” points of entry. We recognize that the focus of the CBSA has traditionally been to prevent drugs, criminals, and firearms from illegally entering Canada. However, the introduction and spread of aquatic invasive mussels also represents a major, long-term environmental and economic threat, which should be given an equivalent level of prevention effort at all prairie and Pacific POEs. Given that a single infested watercraft could be responsible for \$45 million per year of economic damage to the Okanagan alone, it is not sufficient to monitor some POEs, while others allow boats through without following an inspection protocol.

We call for all POE Chiefs of Operations to require mandatory enforcement of the Aquatic Invasive Species regulations through the use of the Uniform Minimum Protocols for Watercraft Interception Programs. In approximately 95% of cases, this would simply require a standard screening interview and short visual inspection to determine that the boat is not considered high-risk. The small amount of extra time taken to conduct these interviews is more than justified if even one infested boat is prevented from entering our waters.

We also call on the federal government to provide funding to the prairie provinces and British Columbia to help contain the current infestations in Manitoba’s Lake Winnipeg and Cedar Lake, and to prevent the introduction of invasive mussels in Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia. In the U.S., the federal

government has recently provided \$4 million in matching prevention funding to the northwestern states, and we call on the Government of Canada to match or exceed that commitment to the provinces.

We urge you to make this issue a priority in your Ministry, and to continue to improve the prevention regime.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Doug Findlater".

Doug Findlater, Chair
Okanagan Basin Water Board

CC:

- Hon. Marc Garneau, P.C., M.P. Minister of Transport
- Hon. Catherine McKenna, P.C., M.P. Minister of Environment and Climate Change
- Hon. Hunter Tootoo, P.C., M.P. Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard
- Okanagan MPs: Stephen Fuhr, Dan Albas, Mel Arnold, Richard Cannings;
- Federal Critics: Hon. Erin O'Toole, Kelly Block, Mark Strahl, Hon Ed Fast;
- Okanagan MLAs: Hon. Christy Clark, Hon. Steve Thomson, Hon. Norm Letnick, Eric Foster, Dan Ashton, Linda Larson, Jackie Tegart, Greg Kylo;
- Regional District Chairs for North Okanagan, Central Okanagan, and Okanagan-Similkameen;
- Okanagan Municipalities;
- Chiefs Executive Council, Okanagan Nation Alliance;
- Matt Morrison, Chief Executive Officer, Pacific NorthWest Economic Region;
- Gail Wallin, Executive Director, Invasive Species Council of B.C.