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NEWS RELEASE

OKANAGAN WATER BOARD EXPANDS SUCCESSFUL “DON’T MOVE A MUSSEL” CAMPAIGN TO STRENGTHEN MUSSEL DEFENCE

Kelowna, B.C. – Since the Okanagan Basin Water Board and its Okanagan WaterWise program launched the Don’t Move A Mussel campaign in 2013, the level of awareness regarding invasive zebra and quagga mussels has exploded in the valley. Today, it launched an expansion of the campaign to further strengthen mussel defence with a news conference down at Kelowna’s Hot Sands Beach.

“According to B.C.’s mussel inspectors, the Okanagan has the highest level of awareness than anywhere in B.C.¹ Now the program is aiming to take its Don’t Move A Mussel message beyond the Okanagan, enlisting the support of its residents to help protect the valley’s waters, encouraging people to “HAVE... THE TALK.” with out-of-town guests, and others,” noted OBWB Chair Doug Findlater.

As part of the effort, the www.DontMoveAMussel.ca website has been updated with information about having the talk, and new radio ads, bus ads and social media ads have been launched. As well, new Don’t Move A Mussel muscle shirts are being distributed by Okanagan WaterWise and partners.

“As we’ve said in the past, we are thankful to see Conservation Officers out conducting inspections this summer, and thankful to industry for financing the program. Now, as we see the number of mussel-infested boats being caught continue to climb, and as we hear about the number of watercraft being quarantined, and the growing number of folks being ticketed for not stopping at mandatory inspection stations, we all need to step up our game,” Findlater added.

As of July 27, since eight inspection stations opened April 1 in B.C., almost 13,000 watercraft have been inspected. Of those, 439 were identified as coming from high-risk areas and nine were found carrying invasive mussels, all from Ontario. Another 50 were quarantined to meet the 30-day drying off period to ensure any mussels attached were dead, 37 people were issued violation tickets and 27 were given warnings for failing to stop for inspection.

The Water Board is continuing to push the province to expand its inspection hours from 8-10 hours/day, seven days a week, to at least daylight hours, and to revise its legislation to require all watercraft entering B.C. to report to an inspection centre before launching in provincial waters. We are also urging the federal government to match \$4 million in U.S. funding to assist with inspection programs on the Canadian side of the border, and ensure Canada Border Services officers are enforcing federal regulations by stopping and interviewing all those coming into Canada with watercraft to determine if an inspection and decontamination is necessary.

“Last year’s inspection numbers showed the Okanagan is at highest risk in B.C. for an infestation. The greatest number of high-risk watercraft intercepted – 36% – were headed to our valley and our waters,” said Corinne Jackson, OBWB’s Communications Director, responsible for Okanagan WaterWise and the Don’t Move A Mussel campaign. “While we continue to push for stronger response from senior levels of government, we

¹ As of early 2013, few locals had heard of zebra and quagga mussels. The OBWB’s Okanagan WaterWise launched “Don’t Move A Mussel” in spring 2013 to raise the level of awareness of these invasive mussels. The campaign included billboards, radio ads, outreach and more. An October 2014 survey, conducted for the OBWB found three out of four Okanagan residents (75%) had heard about zebra and quagga mussels. This rose to four out of five boat owners (80%). In addition, 50% of residents and 66% of boat owners had specifically heard the “Don’t Move A Mussel.” message.

need all hands on deck. We need residents here to help ‘Spread the message. Not the mussel.’ They can do this by talking with those who are coming here with their boats, kayaks, paddleboards, and other water toys.

“We know that it isn’t always easy to have such a conversation, encouraging people to be good stewards of our waters. But if you love our lakes, it’s OK to have the talk,” she said. “We need people to understand that the best way to prevent the spread is to ‘Clean-Drain-Dry’ their watercraft. We need people to understand the importance of stopping at roadside inspection stations.”

According to an extensive 2013 [study](#) conducted for the OBWB, it is estimated that zebra or quagga mussels could cost over \$40 million each year to the Okanagan alone, in lost revenue, added maintenance of aquatic infrastructure, reduced property values, and irreparable ecological damage. The Pacific NorthWest Economic Region estimates a cost of [\\$500 million](#) a year to the Pacific Northwest.

The Water Board’s Operations and Grants Manager James Littlely oversees the agency’s Milfoil Control Program. Since the OBWB began efforts to control and remove the invasive weed in 1970, the agency has spent almost \$11.8 million.

“After more than 40 years of treating milfoil in the valley, the program still costs taxpayers over \$600,000 a year,” said Littlely. “Just imagine when the mussels arrive and it costs millions more each year. Our milfoil program is only treating the shoreline and focusing on public beaches, including right here at Hot Sands Beach. Luckily milfoil doesn’t grow in water pipes, or on boats, or bridges, but mussels will.

“I get calls almost every day from property owners, beach goers and even the odd tourist requesting milfoil control because it interferes with their boating or swimming. Mussels will interfere with a lot more than that. And, as has been shown in other areas, when mussels invade milfoil grows exponentially.

“If you love our waters, we need everyone to take responsibility. One way is to ‘Have the Talk,’” said Littlely.

“If you, or someone you know, uses any kind of watercraft on multiple lakes, it’s important to understand, our lakes are at risk if even just one invasive mussel is introduced,” Jackson added, noting that each female can produce about a million eggs in a single year. Other areas have seen them reproduce in even larger numbers.

“If you have a brother-in-law on the East Coast, bringing his boat out for a vacation here in the Okanagan, talk with him. If you have a neighbour who is a snowbird who hauls their watercraft with them, or if you hear someone talking about buying a jet ski from out of province, have the talk.”

For more information on the mussels, the risks to the Okanagan, and prevention tips – including how to Clean-Drain-Dry – visit www.DontMoveAMussel.ca. To hear the “Have the Talk” radio ads go to <http://dontmoveamussel.ca/more>.