

Okanagan water board wants federal Liberals to pony up for invasive mussel fight

By John McDonald

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Zebra and quagga mussels are identified as two of B.C.'s most "unwanted species"
Image Credit: Invasive Species Council of B.C.

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OKANAGAN - The new Liberal government in Ottawa has promised to spend billions in new infrastructure money and the Okanagan Basin Water Board would love to see some of it used in the fight against invasive mussels here at home.

The board has sent a letter to the federal government reiterating its demands for the establishment of full-time seasonal inspection stations at Banff and Jasper National Parks, increased inspection at international border crossings as well as coordination with the other western provinces on inspection protocols.

"We applaud the Government of Canada's stated commitment to provide much needed infrastructure improvement for Canadian communities," board chair Doug Findlater says in a letter addressed to the newly minted Liberal ministers of public safety, transport, environment and fisheries and oceans.

"While we support this investment, particularly in the area of water supply and quality improvement infrastructure, the cost of necessary future investments in retrofitting and maintenance can be greatly reduced by preventing the spread of invasive zebra and quagga mussels."

The letter is also addressed to the MPs for the four ridings within the water basin's mandate area, including newly elected Liberal MP Stephen Fuhr in the Kelowna-Lake Country riding.

The water board cites estimates from the Pacific NorthWest Economic Region it could cost as much as \$5 billion a year to deal with invasive quagga and zebra mussels and says current funding and inspection efforts are inadequate.

"An infestation could irrevocably harm our environment, economy and way of life. The mussels would impact every water intake, outfall, boat and dock in our lakes and all other in-lake infrastructure," Findlater writes.

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