

## Okanagan water board looking for mussel funding in budget



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In advance of the provincial budget being released on Tuesday, the Okanagan Basin Water Board is throwing its support behind a proposal to help prevent the spread of [invasive zebra and quagga mussels](#) into B.C.

Provincial staff have recommended setting up eight full-time inspection stations at key crossings for the 2016 boating season, including five along the Alberta border, and three along the Washington State border.

Corinne Jackson, communications director for the OBWB, notes that the proposal is consistent with [what the water board has been requesting since 2012](#).

"Since 2012, the OBWB has been a vocal advocate of efforts to prevent invasive mussels," wrote OBWB chair Doug Findlater in a letter to B.C. Environment Minister Mary Polak and Finance Minister Mike de Jong.

The letter acknowledges the work done by provincial and federal governments in legislation, prevention and education, but makes the case for the new proposal.

"Implementing the province's 2016 inspection plan, with an ongoing commitment for resources is a crucial step in protecting provincial water and preventing significant costs in the future," wrote Findlater, noting that the province has estimated an infestation of invasive mussels could cost B.C. \$43 million per year.

"A recent estimate from the Pacific Northwest Economic Region suggests it could cost over \$500 million per year to the economy of the Pacific Northwest. The resources required to carry out the 2016 inspection plan are relatively modest when compared to the cost of an infestation."

[During a 2015 pilot](#), six crews inspected 4,350 boats. Of those 70 were identified as coming from zebra or quagga mussel infected zone, and 15 were confirmed to be carrying mussels or larvae. The largest portion—36 per cent—of the high-risk watercraft traffic was headed to the Okanagan.

De Jong is expected to introduce the 2016 B.C. budget on Feb. 16, at 1:30 p.m.

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