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## NEWS RELEASE

# OKANAGAN WATER BOARD APPLAUDS BC MUSSEL PREVENTION PROGRAM EXPANSION

**Kelowna, B.C.** – The Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) welcomes the B.C. government’s announcement today which will significantly improve protection of provincial waters from invasive zebra and quagga mussels.

“We were very pleased to be at today’s announcement,” said OBWB Chair Tracy Gray. “We have been working to raise awareness regarding invasive mussels since 2012 with the launch of our [Don’t Move A Mussel](#) campaign. Much work has been done since then, working with various partners, including provincial staff and Okanagan’s MLAs, to get to where we are at today.

“A lot of the items that have been on our wish list were announced today,” Gray added. “As Premier Christy Clark noted, the province received our list of recommendations and has been working through it. We look forward to continuing to work with the province to close other potential loopholes that put our waters at risk, this includes tightening regulations.”

Today’s announcement, included:

- the introduction of Kilo, a German Shepherd trained as a multi-purpose dog which will include mussel detection. Kilo is completing training and it’s expected he will start working July 1 at high volume stations on a rotating basis;
- an increase in the number of inspection stations to 10 (up from 8). The two new stations, at Yahk and Midway, join ones already established at Golden, Valemount, and Dawson Creek, as well as mobile stations at Cranbrook, Invermere, Nelson, the Lower Mainland, and Penticton (covering also Midway, Osoyoos and Kaleden);
- nine of the stations will have expanded hours from 8-10 a day to “generally dusk to dawn,” with the Golden station – the busiest – going to 24 hours a day;
- this year’s stations will operate April 1 to Oct. 31, with the intention of expanding in future years to mid-March to mid-November;
- the season will start with 33 auxiliary conservation officers, same as in 2016, and the province is hiring and training an additional 35 to start this June which will bring the total to 68;
- \$450,000 over three years to the Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation (HCTF) to increase mussel monitoring in B.C. lakes; and
- additional equipment for the enhanced program.

Some \$2 mill. in funding for this year’s program is being provided, again, through partnerships with BC Hydro, providing \$1.25 mill., and Fortis BC, Columbia Power, and Columbia Basin Trust each committing \$250,000. New this year, the province has committed \$2.45 mill., primarily for increased staffing, \$150,000 to HCTF (with a three-year funding commitment), and \$170,000 for additional equipment.

As well, in response to a recommendation from the OBWB, the province is addressing the issue of those who enter B.C. outside of inspection hours. Up until now, it has been illegal to transport invasive mussels, dead or alive, in B.C. It has also been mandatory for motorists with watercraft to report to an inspection station during operating hours. Failure to do so can cost \$345. However, there was nothing to catch motorists outside of inspection hours. The OBWB suggested legislative changes to require all watercraft entering B.C. to report to an inspection station, prior to launching in provincial waters. As part of today’s announcement, the

government said that signage will direct motorists to report information about where they are arriving from, their destination in B.C. and to what extent they've taken steps to ensure they are not transporting invasive mussels.

"This is a definite step forward," said Gray.

The OBWB's push for increased provincial and federal mussel protection went into high gear last fall when Montana – a few-hours' drive from B.C. – announced it had discovered invasive mussels in its waters and declared a Natural Resource Emergency. Montana was part of the Pacific NorthWest's perimeter defence.

Gray said that the OBWB is continuing to work with the federal government to also step up mussel protection efforts. This includes a call for increased training and funding for Canada Border Service Agency officers, increased funding for containment to provinces already mussel-infested (Quebec, Ontario and Manitoba), increased funding to mussel-free provinces for prevention, and a commitment to research and education for prevention, containment, control and eradication methods. The Water Board has also called for stronger federal participation in forums to address the mussel issue, such as the intergovernmental Pacific NorthWest Economic Region (PNWER)'s Invasive Species Working Group.

"In addition to working with the province, we look forward to continuing to work with our federal government and other partners, to build a program that will keep our waters invasive mussel-free. For our part, we are committed to continuing our efforts through our Don't Move A Mussel program, as well as providing funding and in-kind support to the Okanagan and Similkameen Invasive Species Society for lake monitoring and boater outreach.

"We also encourage everyone to do their part," added Gray. "We need boaters and others who use our lakes to Clean-Drain-Dry their equipment. And, it's also important that those who do not boat, kayak, etc. to still know the risks and 'Have the Talk' with those who play in our waters – to help spread the message, not the mussels."

Zebra and quagga mussels originate from Eastern Europe and spread quickly with a single female able to produce a million eggs per year. At their youngest, the mussels are the size of a grain of sand, and at their largest the size of a thumbnail (1.5 to 2 cm). The mussels stimulate toxic algae blooms, litter beaches with sharp shells, clog boat motors, foul water intakes and outfalls, put fish and the ecology of lakes at risk, and more. There is no proven method to eradicate the mussels once they arrive that doesn't also cause significant environmental impacts. The Okanagan is considered at high risk because of our warm, calcium-rich waters.

A 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. PNWER, made up of provincial and state government representatives in the Pacific Northwest and with a mission to increase economic well-being and quality of life for all citizens in the region, has estimated a mussel infestation at [\\$500 million](#) a year to the Pacific NW.

For more information on the mussels, risks to the Okanagan, how to 'Have the Talk,' Clean-Drain-Dry and other prevention tips, visit [DontMoveAMussel.ca](http://DontMoveAMussel.ca).

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