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Ottawa to invest in mussel research, education

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The federal government is providing hundreds of thousands of dollars for research and education into invasive mussels, Kelowna-Lake Country MP Stephen Fuhr announced on Monday.

Simon Fraser University in Burnaby will receive \$100,000 over four years to conduct research that will help assess the risk of spread and predict the ecological impacts of these non-native mussels in the Okanagan region, Fuhr said in a news release.

An additional \$400,000 over three years will be invested for education and outreach to complement efforts now underway by the province and Okanagan Basin Water Board. The Canadian Council on Invasive Species will use the funding to create new and updated signage at boat launches, television commercials and information articles, as well as online resources.

Zebra and quagga mussels have not yet been spotted in B.C. waters. However, this region is at high risk of invasion due to the proximity of established populations and the discovery of these mussels on recreational boats intercepted en route to the Okanagan, Fuhr's news release said.

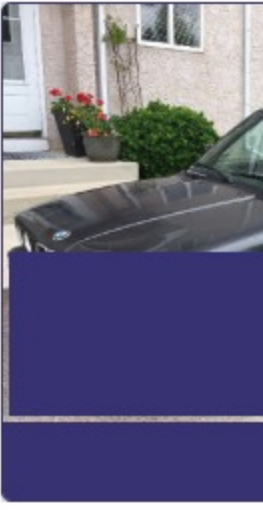
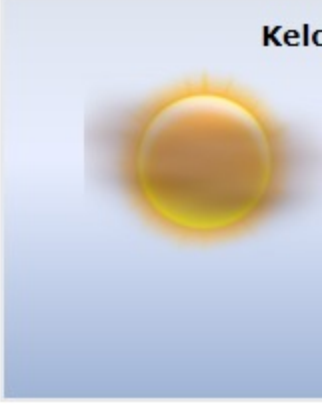
Zebra mussels have been found in Lake Winnipeg, the Great Lakes, Lake St. Clair and the Mississippi river watershed. Quagga mussels have been found in Lake Ontario, Michigan, Huron and Erie and the St. Lawrence River.

The province has measures in place to inspect boats coming into B.C. for invasive mussels, but some critics have complained the measures aren't strong enough.

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Isabelle Cote, who will be conducting the SFU research, hopes her project provides some useful information.

"Co-investigator Jon Moore and I are really excited about this new project," she said in the release. "It's known that zebra mussels have disastrous ecological and economic impacts when they are introduced into new areas. Our hope is that this new project is going to reveal what the ecological stakes are specifically for the Okanagan region if zebra mussels find their way there, and how we can delay this invasion for as long as possible."



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