

August 16, 2018

NEWS RELEASE

OKANAGAN WATER BOARD PRESSES FOR ADDITIONAL FEDERAL MUSSEL FUNDING

Kelowna, B.C. – The Okanagan Basin Water Board welcomes the federal government’s recent funding announcement to address invasive mussels and is resending a prioritized list for more action, and requesting an in-person meeting.

“We are gravely concerned about the impact zebra and quagga mussels would have on the Okanagan and Western Canada,” said OBWB Chair Tracy Gray. Gray was referencing a letter sent by the Water Board today to newly appointed Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Jonathan Wilkinson, reiterating a call for federal funding made in April. “We need the federal government to take stronger action and help reinforce our defenses and contain these mussels where they are at, and work with Western provinces, states, and the U.S. government to protect our waters.

“We do not want to be in a situation, like we’ve heard from officials in Manitoba and elsewhere, where we are infested with zebra or quagga mussels and regret not doing more to prevent it,” Gray added.

According to a 2013 study conducted for the OBWB, the cost of an infestation to the Okanagan alone was conservatively estimated at \$42 million a year in direct costs and lost revenues.

“While we welcome the recent federal announcement of \$133,000 annually over three years for public outreach and education, and \$25,000 annually over four years for research, we ask that you consider the specific actions listed...for your annual budget, which will make a more sustained, substantial contribution to this effort,” the letter reads.

Specifically, the letter calls for more funding for: increased lake monitoring, enhanced inspection program resources, increased outreach, education and research, increased coordination and preparedness, support of expanded B.C. inspection timings and activities; and, increased capacity of B.C.’s Conservation Officer Service K9 Unit. The total request for annual federal funding is \$2,055,000, matching provincial funding.

These actions, the letter notes, “will have greater direct, long-term impacts to protect our B.C. waters.”

“Last year, the U.S. federal government provided \$16 million (USD) to match funding in Pacific Northwest states for mussel prevention efforts. This year, the U.S. Department of Interior requested another \$12 million (USD), which is pending congressional approval,” noted Gray. “Looking at last year’s B.C. inspection stats, we have more infested watercraft trying to enter B.C. from Eastern Canada than the U.S. We must increase our efforts on this side of the border.” In 2017, B.C. inspection stations intercepted 14 mussel-fouled watercraft from Ontario, two from Quebec, and nine from various U.S. locations.

“It seems appropriate that this be included in the annual federal budget since it is a national issue with huge implications for infrastructure, the environment – including fisheries, and more,” Gray added.

For its part, the OBWB has been sounding the alarm about the mussels since 2012. At that time, the OBWB and its Okanagan WaterWise outreach and education program launched the [Don’t Move A Mussel](#) campaign. Since then, it has spent more than \$277,000 in local tax dollars on the initiative, and with support from the Okanagan business community, delivered a program worth over \$800,000. It has also provided \$165,000 in local tax

dollars between 2013 and 2018 to the Okanagan and Similkameen Invasive Species Society to assist with direct boater outreach and to conduct mussel monitoring. There has also been extensive staff and board time spent working on this file.

The OBWB has also been an active participant in the Pacific Northwest Economic Region's Invasive Species Working Group, and actively partnered with the Province of B.C., local governments, the Invasive Species Council of B.C., the Kelowna Chamber of Commerce, and many other organizations on this file.

The letter includes an offer to share the Water Board's "significant local experience and broad reach into the community."

"The OBWB would be pleased to add our expertise to your efforts and work with the groups recently funded by DFO to support both the research and the outreach in the Okanagan and B.C."

Please find attached the letter and background information the OBWB has sent to Min. Wilkinson.

Learn more about the mussels, the risks to the Okanagan, as well as prevention tips to protect our waters, at www.DontMoveAMussel.ca.

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Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson
Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

August 16, 2018

Re: Funding Priorities to Prevent Invasive Mussels from Entering British Columbia

Dear Minister Wilkinson,

The Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) would like to congratulate you on your appointment as the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans, and the Canadian Coast Guard. We also would like to gratefully acknowledge the recent announcement of federal government funding for public outreach, education and research related to the prevention of invasive mussels entering B.C. waters. As we noted in previous correspondence to your ministry, we are gravely concerned about the potential impact of the mussels on Western Canada, and the need to contain these mussels in already-infested waters and prevent them from spreading to B.C. We ask that your ministry take further strong action to reinforce defenses, in partnership with the Western provinces, states, and the U.S. government.

Invasive mussels will cause significant and irreparable harm to the ecosystem, economy and way of life in B.C. A 2013 study, commissioned by the OBWB, conservatively estimated an annual cost of \$42 million in direct costs and lost revenues in the Okanagan region alone if invasive zebra or quagga mussels were to establish here. Estimates from the Pacific NorthWest Economic Region (PNWER) peg the costs of an invasive mussel infestation at \$500 million annually to the region.

Furthermore, invasive mussels may cause a catastrophic collapse of Pacific salmon stocks as they infest the freshwater spawning habitat of multiple species in the Columbia and Fraser systems, both at high risk for infestation and ecological damage. A 2017 study for the Pacific Salmon Commission found that the contribution of the commercial and recreational sectors from Pacific salmon averaged \$1.364 billion (USD) in output, \$850 million (USD) in GDP, \$485 million (USD) in labour income, and 12,400 FTE jobs to the Canadian economy. We cannot afford to lose the spawning habitat which makes these important fisheries viable. The ecologic costs, loss of commercial, recreational and Indigenous fisheries, and regional costs of containment and control are massive compared to the small cost required for prevention.

In December 2016, the OBWB called for action from several federal government ministries to increase training and funding for Canada Border Services Agents, increase funding for containment to provinces that are already mussel-infested (Quebec, Ontario and Manitoba), and increase funding to mussel-free provinces for prevention. We also asked for a commitment to research and education for prevention, containment, control and eradication methods. In addition, in April 2018, we called for specific actions to increase federal funding for mussel prevention in the province of B.C.

We reiterate our previous call from April 2018, for specific actions which will have greater direct, long-term impacts to protect our B.C. waters. We believe these actions fall within the Government of Canada's jurisdiction and should be delivered in cooperation with the province, by provincial authorities. In order to

provide clear, accurate funding estimates, we have been in contact with the Province of B.C., and have provided costs for each item on an annual basis. The following list is in order of priority for increased funding.

1. Increased Lake Monitoring

Financial support for lake monitoring, administered by the Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation.

Request for annual federal funding: \$150,000

2. Enhanced Inspection Program Resources

Capital equipment needed on an ongoing basis for roadside inspections, decontaminations, signage and related equipment for Conservation Officers who are enforcing federal Aquatic Invasive Species legislation.

Request for annual federal funding: \$50,000

3. Increased Outreach, Education and Research

Provide funding for increased outreach, education, and research to stop the import, possession, transport or release of aquatic invasive species. Research component includes:

- Investment in exploring collaborative funding model options such as a boat sticker program, with the Province of B.C. which could leverage partner funds and work to secure long term funding sources.
- Increased federal and provincial staff capacity to enhance regulatory measures intended to mitigate the threat of invasive species, including zebra and quagga mussels.

Request for annual federal funding: \$275,000

4. Increased Coordination and Preparedness

Host an Early Detection Rapid Response exercise to prepare for a potential detection and Quality Assurance/Quality Control of the control options (such as a secret boater exercise), coordination between levels of government and multiple agencies.

Request for annual federal funding: \$30,000

5. Support Expanded Inspection Timings and Activities

Expand inspection station operating hours, staffing levels, and season length including:

- 12 stations and 2 roving crews;
 - 74 auxiliary inspectors (4 for roving crews)
 - 1 station 24hrs (May – Sep);
 - 9 stations dawn to dusk (May – Sep);
 - 2 stations 10hrs/day
 - Station operations Mar 18 – Nov 10

Request for annual federal funding: \$1.5 million

6. Increased Capacity of Conservation Officer Service K9 Unit

Increase the capacity of the Conservation Officer Service K9 unit, which uses specially trained, multi-use dogs, enforcing both federal and provincial laws.

Request for annual federal funding: \$50,000

Total Request for annual federal funding: \$2,055,000

While we welcome the recent federal announcement of \$133,000 annually over three years for public outreach and education, and \$25,000 annually over four years for research, we ask that you consider the specific actions listed above for your annual budget, which will make a more sustained, substantial contribution to this effort. For comparison, the U.S. Department of the Interior allocated \$16 million (USD) last year to match funding in Pacific Northwest states for their mussel prevention efforts. This year, the Department of Interior has requested a further \$12 million (USD), which is pending congressional approval. We estimate that the Government of Canada could make a significant contribution by allocating a fraction of that spending, at \$2 million annually, matching partner funding in the Province of B.C.

Also, given the number of mussel-infested watercraft that are coming from eastern provinces (in 2017 B.C. inspection stations intercepted 14 mussel-fouled watercraft from Ontario, two from Quebec, and nine from various U.S. locations), the need for stronger support on the Canadian side of the border appears critical.

As a regional water leadership agency, the OBWB has supported efforts since 2012 to prevent the introduction of invasive mussels, not only into the Okanagan, but into all un-infested waters throughout Western Canada. We believe that the federal government has a responsibility to help provinces contain these invasive mussels in infested areas, and to prevent their introduction into new areas. The OBWB would be pleased to add our expertise to your efforts and work with the groups recently funded by DFO to support both the research and the outreach in the Okanagan and B.C.

Since 2012, OBWB has run our [Don't Move A Mussel](#) outreach and education campaign, spending more than \$277,000 in local tax dollars on this initiative, and thanks to support from the Okanagan business community, delivering a program worth over \$800,000. We have also provided \$165,000 in local tax dollars between 2013 and 2018 to the Okanagan and Similkameen Invasive Species Society to assist with direct boater outreach and to conduct mussel monitoring, and extensive staff and board time working on this file. As a result, we have significant local experience and broad reach into the community that can complement your efforts.

We have also been an active participant in PNWER's Invasive Species Working Group, and actively partnered with the Province of B.C., local governments, the Invasive Species Council of B.C., the Kelowna Chamber of Commerce, and many other organizations. It is time for the Government of Canada to take a more active role in protecting our waters.

We request an opportunity to discuss this matter further with you, in person, at your convenience. We note that your constituency office is in North Vancouver and would be pleased to meet you there. We thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tracy Gray', with a stylized, cursive script.

Tracy Gray, Chair
Okanagan Basin Water Board

CC:

- Okanagan MPs: Stephen Fuhr, Mel Arnold, Dan Albas, Richard Cannings;

- Federal Critic: Todd Doherty,
- MLAs: Eric Foster, Norm Letnick, Steve Thomson, Ben Stewart, Dan Ashton, Linda Larson, Jackie Tegart, Greg Kylo
- Chiefs Executive Council, Okanagan Nation Alliance;
- Regional District Chairs for North Okanagan, Central Okanagan, and Okanagan-Similkameen;
- Okanagan Municipalities;
- Matt Morrison, Chief Executive Officer, Pacific NorthWest Economic Region;
- Gail Wallin, Executive Director, Invasive Species Council of B.C.
- Kelowna Chamber of Commerce

Annex A

OKANAGAN BASIN WATER BOARD

The Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) is a unique local government agency in the central interior of B.C., located on the trans-boundary waters of the Okanagan River, which feeds into the Columbia River. The Okanagan watershed is almost 200 km in length, covering 8,000 km² in area and over 40,000 ha of lake surface area. The OBWB serves three regional districts, 11 municipalities, and five of the member bands of the Okanagan Nation. The Okanagan Valley is home to more than 340,000 residents and the fastest growing metropolitan area in B.C.

The OBWB's mission is to provide leadership to protect and enhance quality of life in the Okanagan Basin through sustainable water management. Part of our mandate is to define water problems and priorities, the economic feasibility of solutions, responsibility, necessary legislation and required action.

Since 2012, the OBWB has been a vocal advocate of enhancing invasive mussel prevention, as the Okanagan is at very high risk for invasion based on water chemistry, temperature and other conditions. The Okanagan River is the most productive Sockeye salmon spawning habitat in the Columbia system, accounting for 80% of the total population. The Okanagan River is the focus of major restoration and fisheries improvement work by the Okanagan Nation Alliance, to which the species is of critical importance for cultural, food and spiritual purposes.

The OBWB also has a 40 year history of controlling invasive milfoil in the valley, at a direct cost to residents of over \$650,000 annually. The cost of managing our infrastructure, losses in the tourism and agriculture industries, and ecological losses from an infestation of mussels would be disastrous.

Annex B

CURRENT INVASIVE MUSSEL DISTRIBUTION IN NORTH AMERICA

