

November 21, 2018

## NEWS RELEASE

# OKANAGAN WATER BOARD CALLS FOR B.C. LEGISLATION TO PROTECT B.C. WATERS FROM INVASIVE MUSSELS

**Kelowna, B.C.** – The Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) is renewing a call for legislation that would require all out-of-province watercraft to be inspected for invasive zebra and quagga mussels before launching in B.C. waters. The call was sent in a letter this week to B.C. Minister of Environment and Climate Change George Heyman.

“This legislative change was the first priority in our list of action items provided to your ministry on October 20, 2017, following our meetings at the 2017 Union of BC Municipalities conference,” the letter, signed by OBWB Executive Director Anna Warwick Sears, states. “We feel that there is still sufficient time before the 2019 boating season for the province to pass this legislation, and ensure that inspections are available in centralized locations for those with watercraft who do not report to a roadside station.”

Currently, if someone enters B.C. with any type of watercraft and it encounters an open inspection station on route, law requires that it must stop for inspection. However, this leaves a gap for watercraft that enter outside of inspection station hours, outside of the inspection season (April to October), or through routes which are not monitored.

“The province will never be able to completely seal the border,” notes Sears. It is also an achievable, enforceable and almost immediate improvement. This change, she explained, would allow for spot-checking out-of-province watercraft for proof of an inspection at local boat launches, enhancing enforcement of the law.

“Now that we’ve seen the results from this year’s inspection program, we want to highlight what we see as remaining gaps,” Sears added, explaining the reason for the letter.

The letter acknowledges improvements to the program this year. This year, the province responded to repeated calls from the OBWB to have ongoing, stable funding for the program with the announcement of \$1 million in dedicated annual funding. A second sergeant was added to help address non-compliance. Inspection stations increased from 10 in 2017 to 12 in 2018, with 62 auxiliary conservation officers. As well, it was announced that a second mussel-sniffing dog was being trained to join the effort in 2019.

As for final inspection numbers for this year, a total of 25 watercraft were found to be carrying adult invasive mussels. The mussel-fouled boats came from Ontario (16), Arizona (3), Manitoba (2), Michigan (2), Utah (1) and Nevada (1), and were destined for the Lower Mainland (9), Vancouver Island (5), Thompson-Nicola (4), Okanagan (3), and the Kootenays (1). The program received advanced notice for 20 of the 25 mussel-infested watercraft, either from another jurisdiction (e.g., Alta., Mont., Idaho or Wash.) or by Canada Border Services Agents.

“It’s too important to not do everything that we can,” added Sears. “It’s going to cost us millions and cause, not only hardship but, heartbreak if Okanagan lakes are spoiled by invasive mussels.”

A 2013 [study](#) for the Water Board estimated invasive mussels would cost the Okanagan \$43 million a year to just manage. The Pacific NorthWest Economic Region (PNWER), made up of provincial and state government representatives, 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.

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 in-kind support from the Okanagan business community, delivered a program worth over \$800,000. It has also provided \$165,000 between 2013 and 2018 to the Okanagan and Similkameen Invasive Species Society to assist with direct boater outreach and to conduct mussel water monitoring.

The OBWB has 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 on this file.

Please find attached the letter OBWB has sent to Min. Heyman.

Learn more about the mussels, the risks to the Okanagan, and find prevention tips and information on what to do if bringing watercraft into B.C. at [www.DontMoveAMussel.ca](http://www.DontMoveAMussel.ca).

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**Hon. George Heyman**  
Minister of Environment and Climate Change  
PO Box 9360 Stn Prov Govt  
Victoria, BC V8W 9M2

November 20, 2018

**Re: Legislative Changes to Prevent Invasive Mussels**

Dear Minister Heyman,

Since 2015, the province of B.C. has taken significant and impactful action in its mussel prevention and education programs, improving each year - most recently with your announcement of annual funding for the prevention regime. On behalf of the OBWB, I thank you for taking this important step to protect our waters. On August 6, 2018, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau also announced new federal funding to help in the prevention of invasive zebra and quagga mussels into B.C. This announcement was partially informed by our ongoing calls to action for the federal government to provide assistance to western provinces in their efforts to keep invasive mussels out of the Pacific Northwest, including B.C. and the Okanagan.

While we commend the recent announcements, and recognize the improvement that will be made through stable funding for inspection stations, we are concerned that four years after the first roving inspections were conducted in B.C., there is still no legal requirement for out-of-province watercraft to be inspected prior to launching in provincial waters. The current legislation dictates that if a watercraft enters B.C, and if it encounters an open inspection station on route, it must stop for inspection. However, this leaves a gap for watercraft that enter outside of inspection station hours, outside of the inspection season, or through routes which are not monitored. We feel that the province's number one priority for mussel prevention should be addressing this legislative gap.

This legislative change was the first priority in our list of action items provided to your ministry on October 20, 2017, following our meetings at the 2017 UBCM conference. We feel that there is still sufficient time before the 2019 boating season for the province to pass this legislation, and ensure that inspections are available in centralized locations for boaters who do not report to a roadside station. Further, we recognize that this legislative change is more cost-effective than providing 24 hour inspection stations, which have been called for in the past. This change would also allow for spot-checking out-of-province watercraft for proof of an inspection at local boat launches, enhancing the enforcement of the law.

We call on the Province of B.C. to make these legislative changes immediately in preparation for the next boating season to keep our shared B.C. waters invasive mussel-free.

Over the next few months the OBWB will continue to work with provincial staff and other partners to support public messaging of the “Clean, Drain, Dry” protocol through our Don’t Move A Mussel campaign. You can also count on our continued support, through our calls to action, for increased and ongoing federal funding and other support to the western provinces’ mussel prevention efforts.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Anna L. Warwick Sears". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'S' at the end.

Anna Warwick Sears, Executive Director  
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