

July 18, 2019

## NEWS RELEASE

# OKANAGAN WATER BOARD RENEWS CALL FOR STRONGER INVASIVE MUSSEL REGULATIONS IN B.C.

**Kelowna, B.C.** – In reviewing updates to B.C.’s invasive mussel inspection program and recent stats for 2019, the Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) recognizes this year’s program improvements and is calling for additional regulations to further protect B.C. waters.

“Until we know we are in the clear and there is no chance of invasive mussels making their way into our waters, we are going to be pushing for senior government to do all they can to protect our waters,” explained OBWB Chair Sue McKortoff. “Our lakes are not only an important tourist destination, they are important as a source of drinking water, to our fishery and the Okanagan’s delicate ecosystem, and much more.” McKortoff was speaking to a letter sent this week by the board to B.C. Minister of Environment and Climate Change George Heyman.

As of July 5, the most recent stats available, 384 high-risk watercraft were intercepted coming into B.C. Of these, 35 decontamination orders with quarantine periods were issued to meet the 30-days-out-of-water requirement. (Another 92 decontaminations were done as a precaution for other aquatic invasive species.) Of the 35 decontaminated for mussels, nine boats and one kayak were found to be carrying adult invasive mussels. The watercraft were coming from Ontario (6), Utah (2), North Carolina (1) and Michigan (1). Two of the 10 were headed to the Okanagan, while the others were destined for Vancouver Island (3), the Lower Mainland (2), the Kootenays (2) and Alaska (1). The program received advance notice from other jurisdictions on eight of the 10 mussel-fouled watercraft.

“It’s wonderful that we have 64 inspectors, three full-status Conservation Officers who can chase down those who fail to stop at inspection stations, and two K9s to help sniff out mussels. But we only have one of 12 provincial inspection stations that are open 24-hours a day and there is no requirement to get an inspection when a station is closed. We need to tighten things up,” added McKortoff. “This is of paramount importance.”

In particular, the OBWB is repeating its call for legislation requiring that all watercraft entering B.C. be inspected before being allowed to launch in provincial waters. It is also recommending the province implement “pull the plug,” legislation already implemented in Alberta and in Northwest states, requiring drain plugs be removed from watercraft before transport. The board also recommends renewing a public-private partnership between the province and several partners including BC Hydro, Fortis BC and others which has helped fund the inspection program and expires in early 2021. And finally, the OBWB is calling for the province to increase the program’s funding to at least 2017 levels of \$4.45 mill. to expand and strengthen the program.

For its part, the letter states that, the OBWB’s Okanagan WaterWise outreach and education program launched the [Don’t Move A Mussel](#) campaign in 2013. Since then, it has spent \$327,000 and with support from community partners delivered a campaign worth more than \$850,000. It has also provided \$195,000 during this time to the Okanagan and Similkameen Invasive Species Society (OASISS) to conduct additional outreach to boaters and water monitoring for mussels.

“According to our research,” the letter continues, “a mussel infestation would cost the Okanagan at least \$42 million a year to just manage. As such, since inspection stations were introduced in 2015, our combined efforts have potentially saved more than \$168 million in the Okanagan alone.”

“We can’t stop there,” added McKortoff, noting that OBWB-OkWaterWise re-launched an updated Don’t Move A Mussel campaign before the May long-weekend and has been doing public outreach throughout the valley. “The combined programs are great, but they’re not catching everyone as is. We all need to keep pushing forward and making improvements along the way.”

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

Learn more about the mussels, the risks to the Okanagan, find prevention tips, information on what to do if bringing watercraft into B.C. and how you can help protect our waters 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

July 17, 2019

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

Dear Minister Heyman,

On behalf of the Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB), I am writing to acknowledge the significant progress and success of the provincial invasive mussel prevention program since it was established in 2015. In reviewing recent statistics for the program and the interception of 10 mussel-infested watercraft headed for B.C. waters between April 1 and July 5, we believe the importance of the program is undisputed.

We would like to thank you for again choosing the Okanagan for the launch of the annual inspection program, and to announce the addition of a third full-status Conservation Officer and a second dog to the K9 program this year. The OBWB strongly supports this action and the ongoing work of your staff and the Conservation Officer Service. Our support includes our public outreach campaign [Don't Move A Mussel](#) and the inclusion of the "Clean, Drain, Dry" message on our outreach materials. Since 2013, the OBWB has spent \$327,000 and with support from community partners delivered a campaign worth more than \$850,000. We have also contributed \$195,000 during this time to assist the Okanagan and Similkameen Invasive Species Society (OASISS) to conduct outreach to boaters and water monitoring for mussels. As a result of these activities, a 2018 OASISS survey indicated that 90% of boaters surveyed at Okanagan boat launches were aware of invasive mussels.

According to our research, a mussel infestation would cost the Okanagan at least \$42 million a year to just manage. As such, since inspection stations were introduced in 2015, our combined efforts have potentially saved more than \$168 million in the Okanagan alone. Ongoing invasive mussel prevention continues to represent a major investment for British Columbians. Since 2012, OBWB has been an active partner, identifying potential gaps in the prevention regime, both at the provincial and federal levels, and assisting with public education to build support for ongoing prevention efforts. There remain a few legislative and operational gaps which we hope you will address during the current inspection season.

1. Current provincial legislation does not require a watercraft owner to remove the drain plug of their watercraft prior to transporting it. This legislation exists in Alberta and in Northwest partner states, but not in B.C. 'Pull the plug' legislation will help ensure that water drains into the same

waterbody from where it came, and allow officers to judge if a person has cleaned, drained and dried their vessel. This legislation would help prevent an invasive mussel introduction, as well as help prevent the spread of other existing invasive species between watersheds in our province.

2. We reiterate our call to introduce legislation requiring all watercraft entering B.C. to report for an inspection prior to launching in provincial waters. Such legislation would compel watercraft owners to have their vessel inspected, even if they enter the province outside of highway inspection station hours, or in the off-season. We understand that this requires additional public outreach, but feel that it is an important step to enhancing the effectiveness of the prevention program.

Since the initial steps of an inspection only involve determining if a watercraft is high-risk, partner organizations such as marina operators, yacht clubs and other businesses could receive training and certification to perform an initial inspection. If a craft is determined to be high-risk, the partner would have a duty to contact an appropriate provincial agency for follow up. This model would function in a similar way as the partnership between Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) and provincial inspection teams, where CBSA performs an initial inspection and notifies the Conservation Officer Service of high-risk watercraft.

Another alternative would be to enact a boat sticker program, such as the one used in Idaho. Idaho's revenue from invasive species boat stickers cover the costs of vessel inspections, washing stations, and information materials to help prevent the introduction of aquatic invasive species.

3. Also, we recently made a submission to B.C.'s Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government services calling for the renewal of the private-public funding agreement which has been used to fund inspection stations for the past several years. It is our understanding that this agreement will expire in early 2021, which will lead to uncertainty in operational planning which necessarily will begin in 2020. We ask you to work to renew this agreement for long-term program funding for at least five more years.

4. Another recommendation to the Committee was to increase inspection program funding at least back to 2017 levels at \$4.45 million. We recognize that this program is now doing more with less due to the hard work of provincial staff and new operational efficiencies. We also recognize that with 64 auxiliary officers, each of the three full-status CO's is responsible for managing between 20 and 22 people spread out among four inspection stations spanning several hundred kilometers. In addition, two of the full status CO's are responsible for managing a K9 with specialized training and caretaking needs. We call for the addition of another full-status CO, and two more K9s, so that each supervisor is responsible for 16 staff at three inspection stations, and so that their inspection capacity is enhanced through the use of these highly effective dogs.

We have attached our submission to the Committee at Appendix A for your reference.

Again, thank you for your continued leadership in preventing aquatic invasive species introductions into B.C. waters.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Smckortoff". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sue McKortoff, 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.
- Okanagan Chambers of Commerce

*Submission to B.C.'s Select Standing Committee on Finance and  
Government Services from the Okanagan Basin Water Board*

June 27 2019

**PREVENTION OF INVASIVE MUSSEL INTRODUCTIONS TO BRITISH COLUMBIA**

**BACKGROUND**

Invasive zebra and quagga mussels, first introduced to the Great Lakes in the 1980's, substantially alter aquatic food webs, put drinking water at risk, damage infrastructure and harm human recreational values. Current federal regulations (*Aquatic Invasive Species Regulation*, 2015) prohibit the importation, possession, transportation and release of these mussels in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. The Province of B.C. introduced roadside watercraft inspection stations in 2015, and since that time has inspected over 105,000 watercraft, identifying over 4,400 as "high-risk." Through this program, provincial staff have intercepted 82 watercraft that were carrying invasive mussels.

**CONSIDERATIONS**

The economic impact of invasive mussels in lost revenue and added maintenance to aquatic infrastructure has been estimated to exceed \$42 million per year in the Okanagan alone, and \$500 million annually in the Pacific Northwest. The annual cost on the Great Lakes to control zebra mussels in water intakes alone is \$250 million. By preventing an infestation when inspections started in 2015, the province has potentially saved over \$168 million in the Okanagan alone. However, this is not simply an Okanagan issue. Most of the province, including **the entire Fraser River basin and Lower Mainland is at high-risk for infestation** based on water chemistry and temperature. Given the significant infrastructure for drinking water, waste water, transportation, cooling systems and shipping that are at risk in the Fraser River delta, the prevention of invasive mussels is **an economic imperative**. This program is a significant investment in the provincial economy, and with program costs of under \$3.75 million per year - more than half provided through private partners - prevention represents a major return on investment.

Mussel infestations negatively affect municipal water, hydropower, and agricultural irrigation systems by clogging water intakes and distribution pipes, and fouling aquatic infrastructure such as bridges and marinas. They also negatively impact tourism and recreation by attaching to boats, littering beaches with sharp shells, increasing the volume of aquatic weeds along lake shorelines and creating toxic algae blooms. These algae blooms also put drinking water at risk and substantially alter the aquatic ecosystem, putting salmon, a keystone species that is already threatened, at grave risk. These mussels have also been identified as a threat to B.C.'s endangered Rocky Mountain Ridged Mussel by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (2010).

While the province has made significant improvements to the annual inspection program, including the addition of a third full-status Conservation Officer (CO) and a second dog to the program's K9 unit this year, gaps remain. Three full-status COs are responsible for managing 64 Auxiliary COs across the province at 12 inspection stations spread many hours apart. Currently, Auxiliaries assigned to B.C.'s Invasive Mussel Defence Program do not have the authority to chase down those who fail to stop at mandatory roadside inspection stations. In 2018, more than 9,400 watercraft were recorded failing

to stop at these stations, and of those, only 132 were ticketed or warned for their actions. More full status officers are needed.

Finally, provincial inspection reports suggest the B.C. CO Service's K9 program has a higher success rate of detecting invasive mussels, including on vessels previously cleared by human inspectors. Already early in the 2019 inspection season, a B.C. K9 member detected mussels on a boat that had entered the province from the south, and had already been decontaminated by a partner state. These dogs are efficient and effective at locating invasive mussels on watercraft, and they are also trained to provide other services like wildlife detection, firearms detection and other enforcement-related detections.

#### **DIRECT IMPACT ON BUDGET**

- In 2019 the total invasive mussel inspection budget is \$3.75 million coming from the following sources:
  - o BC Hydro - \$1.25 million
  - o Columbia Basin Trust - \$250,000
  - o Columbia Power - \$250,000
  - o Fortis BC - \$250,000
  - o Province of B.C. – \$1.75 million
  
- Based on a cost estimate of an infestation in the Okanagan alone of \$42 million/year, this is a savings of over \$38 million for 2019 in just this one region.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROVINCIAL BUDGET**

The current level of funding at \$3.75 million per year is a minimal allocation for the mussel prevention program, and is a reduction over the 2017 allocation of \$4.45 million. In 2017, OBWB presented to this committee, asserting that the minimal budget of \$4.45 million must be maintained. It has not.

Further, the current practice of public-private partnerships for funding the program is not reliable in the long-term and puts undue onus on private sector utilities and the Columbia Basin Trust. The original private-public partnership agreements signed in 2016 are set to expire in 2021 with no apparent commitment of supplementary provincial funding. Should these agreements lapse with no replacement funding, the invasive mussel prevention program will become ineffective.

We ask that the province increase the budget back to at least \$4.45 million for the 2020 inspection season, including funding for the addition of a fourth full-status CO and another two K9 units. This would mean that each full status CO with a K9 would be responsible for three inspection stations and 16 Auxiliary staff, creating a more effective program, and reducing the excessive workload for these officers.

Finally, we ask the province to begin working to renew public-private partnerships for ongoing funding of the inspection program at minimum at the 2017 funding level of \$4.45 million. Ideally, the province would increase their ongoing budgeted funding for this program beyond \$1 million annually, but the public private partnerships are an acceptable alternative until a business case can be built for a self-sustaining program.

If B.C. does not create a sustained, reliable system for publicly funding its mussel inspection program, we risk losing the best and most critical asset we have in this province – our beautiful, clean fresh waters.