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Feds need to step up game in fight against invasive mussels in Okanagan, Shuswap: letter

Rob Munro

B.C. Conservation Officer Cynthia Mann and her K9 partner Major conduct a mussel inspection demonstration in this undated photo. Major is one of two dogs in B.C. trained to sniff out invasive mussels.
Image Credit: SUBMITTED / Okanagan Basin Water Board

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Two water protection agencies in the Okanagan and Shuswap have joined forces to urge the federal government to get serious about keeping invasive Zebra and Quagga Mussels out of the province.

The Okanagan Basin Water Board and the Shuswap Watershed Council recently sent a joint letter to Bernadette Jordan, the new Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, calling for action.

"Every year we experience invasive mussel-infested watercraft arriving at our borders – heading to the Okanagan, the Shuswap and other B.C. locations with the vast majority coming from mussel-infested waters within Canada," Okanagan Basin Water Board chair Sue McKortoff said in a news release. "And every year, our water is put at risk – for drinking, for fish and other wildlife. Our famous beaches, our water infrastructure, and more, is also put at risk."

B.C.'s mussel inspection program found 22 infested boats heading into B.C. this year, with 16 being from Ontario. There are also invasive mussel populations in Manitoba.

As of now, there are no known incidents of mussels actually getting into B.C. lakes but if they do, it could cost \$42 million a year in the Okanagan alone to manage an infestation – a cost that would be borne by local taxpayers, the release states.



"An invasion in B.C. salmon spawning grounds could cause a "catastrophic collapse of Pacific salmon stocks."

While the federal government committed \$400,000 last year, the water boards say much more needs to be done, including funding for more inspection stations in B.C. Since the ministry doesn't have funding authority for such actions, it's being recommended that Parks Canada foot that bill by inspecting boats at the national parks in Banff and Jasper.

It also calls for funding to inspect more water bodies for the mussels and expanding [education programs](#).

The two agencies also want the federal government to enforce current regulations that require boats leaving infested Canadian lakes to be inspected and decontaminated, if appropriate.

The full letter can be seen [here](#).