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Home > Opinion > ALBAS: Lake mussels a problem

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By Dan Albas on January 16, 2020

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DAN ALBAS

View from the HILL

Recently the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard announced that a project would be undertaken on the Fraser River to remove an abandoned 75 year old, nearly 200' long, former transport vessel.

The reason for the removal is that "there are imminent risks of pollution threat, hull corrosion, possible sinking and fire".

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The cost of this project is estimated to be \$3.3 million, that may or may not be recoverable from the vessels owners, assuming they can be identified.

That the Federal Government is taking action against derelict and abandoned vessels will certainly be welcome news in many areas that have experienced firsthand the adverse environmental impact of this problem.

My issue is not with this project itself, but rather the importance of being proactive.

Here in the Okanagan, we face the very serious threat of aquatic invasive freshwater mussels.

These mussels can clog water intakes causing serious damage to irrigation infrastructure as well as domestic and civic water systems.

Further, as an invasive species, an infestation of these mussels can also create serious adverse impacts on local fish habitat such as the pacific salmon, and other freshwater ecosystems.

If an infestation did occur in Okanagan Lake, considering the connected Okanagan river drainage system as well as other surrounding freshwater lakes, the threat of other regions being seriously impacted through contamination would be significant and likely.



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The Okanagan Basin Water Board predicts that the costs of managing an infestation are estimated to be \$42 million per year in the Okanagan valley alone.

These would be costs forced onto local taxpayers, pending other financial support from the Provincial and Federal Government.

It is easy to understand why it makes far more sense to be proactive in this situation, provide additional resources now, to prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species, than to spend significantly more funds addressing an infestation after the fact.

Despite this reality, the Federal Liberal Government continues to largely ignore this threat creating a situation that I believe all citizens of the Okanagan should find unacceptable.

If this Government can prioritize \$12 million to help Loblaw's purchase new refrigerators, surely it can also prioritize the roughly \$2 million in annual funding requested from the Okanagan Basin Water Board to protect the interior freshwater lakes of the Okanagan and British Columbia.

My question this week is:

Do you agree?

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