

# Protect the lake urges Water Board

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Lake photo by Yvonne Turgeon

## Okanagan survey highlights water awareness

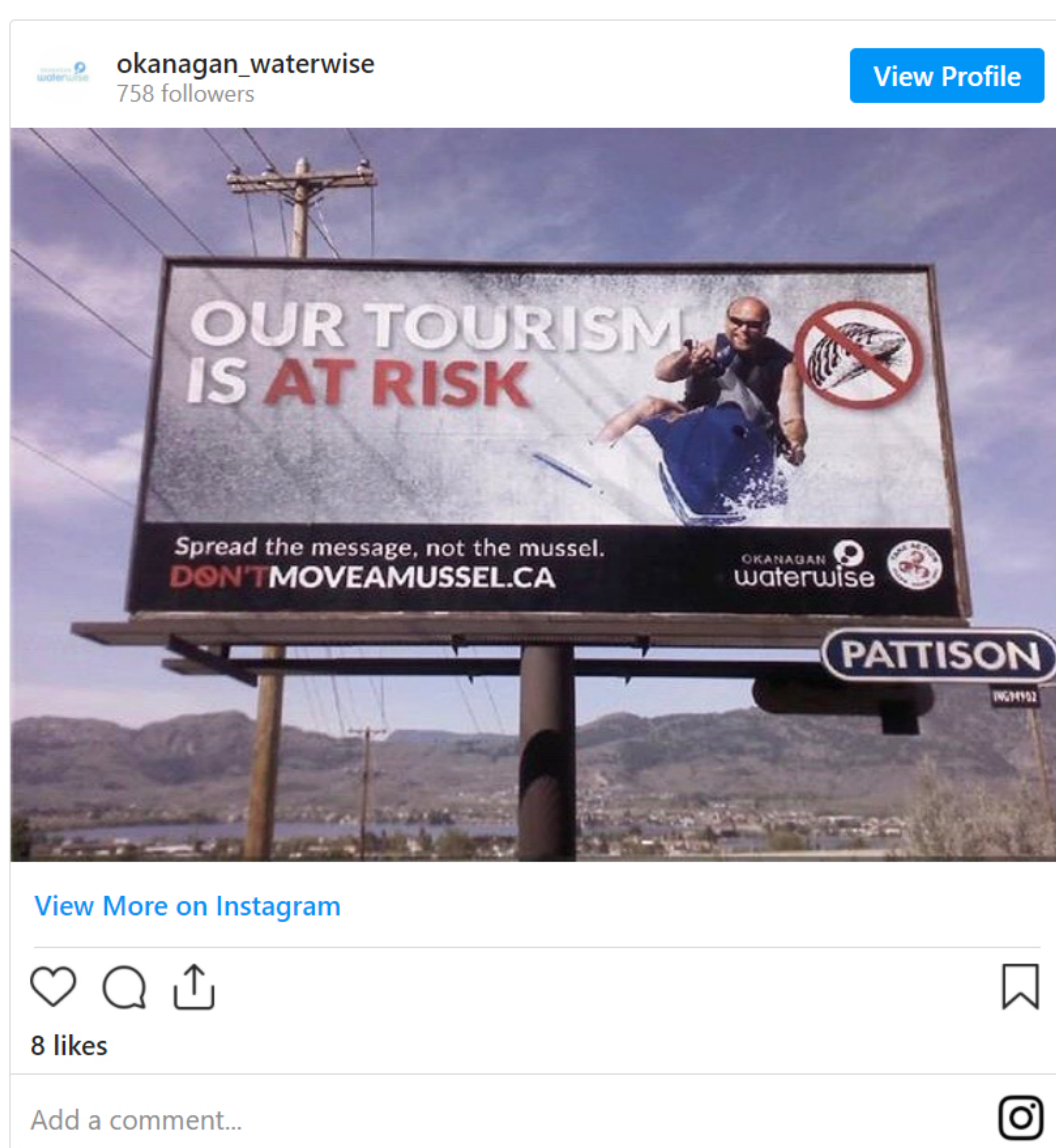
Protect the lake is the call from the Okanagan Basin Water Board, a sentiment echoed in a recent survey of Okanagan residents who have growing concerns for water issues in the valley and support for conservation and protection.

“Despite being known for our lakes, the Okanagan has among the lowest amounts of water available in Canada, and yet we have one of the highest rates of water use,” said Water Board chair Sue McKortoff. “Anything we can do to make people aware of this precious resource, and protect it, is important.”

Fires and mussels remain the top two concerns, however the climate crisis has risen to number three.

Among those surveyed, 85 percent have heard of invasive zebra and quagga mussels; with an awareness of the “Don’t Move A Mussel” campaign highest with watercraft owners. When asked the purpose of the message, well over half said to *clean your watercraft before going into the lake* (up to 64% from 36% in 2014).

“With continued concern about the introduction of invasive mussels into our waters, it is great to see the level of awareness for this issue,” said Corinne Jackson, communications director.



## 85% of Okanaganites practice water conservation

A total of 85 percent of respondents stated they practice water conservation. Among those who say they conserve, the number one method identified was watering their yard less (53% of responses). This is good news, added Jackson, saying that this is truly where Okanagan residents can have the greatest impact on their consumption.

Other conservation methods used: 43% indicated they *wash clothes with fuller loads* (up from 37% in 2014) and 39% *use the dishwasher less often and with fuller loads* (up from 19% in 2014). Some (18%) indicated they changed to low-water landscape (up from 10% in 2014) – and a key *Make Water Work* message.

## Keeping it clean

“As water utilities try to address ongoing water quality issues, the importance of messaging ways to keep the water clean is becoming a growing issue. And not just in the valley bottom, but also in the backcountry, the source of water for many residents,” said Jackson.

Just over half of respondents report protecting water quality. Among the top ways they protect water, they *do not put anything down the storm drain* (63%), *don’t flush unused medications and return them to the pharmacy* (34%), and *do not wash fats, oil or grease down the drain and instead dispose of in the garbage* (33%). Another 26% said they *do not use chemical fertilizers on lawn or garden*.

The Water Board hired an Okanagan polling firm to conduct the survey which included 500 residents, stratified to ensure equal representation from throughout the valley. A survey of this size is considered accurate within  $\pm 4.4\%$ . A similar survey was conducted in 2014.

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