

June 9, 2023

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**WATER BOARD TROUBLED BY NEW PROVINCIAL REPORT ON
INVASIVE MUSSEL COSTS**

Kelowna, B.C. – As boaters begin to flock to Okanagan lakes and other B.C. waterways, the Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) is sounding the alarm in response to a recent B.C. Government report that suggests a zebra or quagga mussel infestation would cost the province \$64 to \$129 mill. annually. And this is not even a full accounting, adds the Water Board.

“We appreciate the level of detail given by your report, looking at the potential financial impacts of invasive mussels on hydro facilities, irrigation infrastructure, municipal water treatment facilities, domestic water intakes, losses in property values and property taxes, tourism, boats and marinas. However, the report does not, and probably could not calculate the terrible impacts these mussels would cause to our natural systems,” states a letter to B.C. Minister Water, Land and Resource Stewardship Nathan Cullen and Minister of Environment and Climate Change Strategy George Heyman.

“While the board had been waiting to see this updated report for a few years and had anticipated bad news, the research results were deeply troubling,” the letter reads, noting the absence of costs to the local fishery and quality of life. “An economic study cannot quantify the impacts to our children and grandchildren who would grow up missing the experience of playing along the beaches and swimming in the lakes free from piles of razor-sharp mussel shells. It cannot quantify the harm the mussels will cause to the populations of sockeye and Chinook salmon, that are being restored back from the brink of extinction by the efforts of the Okanagan Nation Alliance and their partners. It cannot quantify the losses to the health and environmental quality of our beautiful lake system – also a critical source of drinking water to a growing population.

“What is more, the report cannot quantify the disruption of life caused by the inevitable need to quarantine lakes, the required inspections of all watercraft (not just ones from out of province), or the delays and trouble to the general public – whether boat owners or not. Our international reputation for clean lakes with excellent water quality will be lost. For all these reasons, even given the extremely high financial costs of an invasion to the public and private sectors that your report notes, the true costs will be far higher.”

In speaking to the letter, OBWB Exec. Dir. Anna Warwick Sears said, “The costs of an infestation are appalling on two levels. The first is the gross costs which will make us all poorer. But more importantly, it makes you think about all we value that can’t be qualified. I love the beaches and the clean water, and I don’t want to lose them,” she added.

Working within its mandate, the Water Board first sounded the alarm regarding mussels in 2012 and in 2013 launched its [“Don’t Move A Mussel”](#) campaign to raise awareness. It then partnered with the Okanagan and Similkameen Invasive Species Society, providing funds to conduct outreach to watercraft owners, to help spread the message and encourage the use of Clean, Drain, Dry protocols. In 2015, the Government of B.C. started its mussel inspection program and each year since has intercepted mussel-fouled watercraft on their way into B.C.

“The only way a mussel invasion will be prevented is through vigilant action by your ministries. The OBWB has provided many specific calls to action in the past. We are grateful for those you have acted upon, and

we encourage you to go further and make this a top priority for both your ministries,” the letter concludes.

Please find attached, the OBWB’s letter to the province.

To read the province’s report *Potential Economic Impact of Zebra and Quagga Mussels in B.C.*, visit <https://bit.ly/3J3ubT8>.

For more information on zebra and quagga mussels, the risks to the Okanagan, and how to prevent their spread, please visit www.DontMoveAMussel.ca.

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Honourable Nathan Cullen
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June 8, 2023

Honourable George Heyman
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Re: Report on the Potential Economic Impact of Zebra and Quagga Mussels in B.C.

Dear Ministers,

The Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) is a partnership of the three regional districts of the Okanagan Basin, with external board directors from the Okanagan Nation Alliance, the Water Supply Association of B.C., and the Okanagan Water Stewardship Council. Directors appointed by the regional districts include mayors and other elected officials from Armstrong in the north to Osoyoos in the south. Our mandate is to protect and enhance the quality of life in the Okanagan through sustainable water management.

For more than 10 years, one of the board's gravest concerns has been a potential infestation of invasive zebra and quagga mussels establishing in B.C. waterways. Your latest report brings even more urgency to this matter, especially in the Okanagan. Mussels are most often spread via infested watercraft and provincial stats show a large proportion of mussel-fouled watercraft from out-of-province are headed to the Okanagan Valley. This, plus our warm, calcium-rich waters put us at high risk for an infestation and all the costs and impacts associated with them.

The OBWB recently received the B.C. Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship's report titled: *Potential Economic Impact of Zebra and Quagga Mussels in B.C.* We appreciate the level of detail given by your report, looking at the potential financial impacts of invasive mussels on hydro facilities, irrigation infrastructure, municipal water treatment facilities, domestic water intakes, losses in property values and property taxes, tourism, boats and marinas. However, the report does not, and probably could not calculate the terrible impacts these mussels would cause to our natural systems.

While the board had been waiting to see this updated report for a few years and had anticipated bad news, the research results were deeply troubling. Even more so, we recognize that the estimated costs, ranging from \$69 to \$129 million a year, do not include many of the priceless aspects to our environment and quality of life that would be lost if these mussels become established in B.C.

An economic study cannot quantify the impacts to our children and grandchildren who would grow up missing the experience of playing along the beaches and swimming in the lakes free from piles of razor-sharp mussel shells. It cannot quantify the harm the mussels will cause to the populations of sockeye and Chinook salmon, that are being restored back from the brink of extinction by the efforts of the Okanagan Nation Alliance and their partners. It cannot quantify the losses to the health and environmental quality of our beautiful lake system – also a critical source of drinking water to a growing population.

What is more, the report cannot qualify the disruption of life caused by the inevitable need to quarantine lakes, the required inspections of all watercraft (not just ones from out of province), or the delays and trouble to the general public – whether boat owners or not. Our international reputation for clean lakes with excellent water quality will be lost. For all these reasons, even given the extremely high financial costs of an invasion to the public and private sectors that your report notes, the true costs will be far higher.

The only way a mussel invasion will be prevented is through vigilant action by your ministries. The OBWB has provided many specific calls to action in the past. We are grateful for those you have acted upon, and we encourage you to go further and make this a top priority for both your ministries. We will be providing updated calls for action later this year, but felt it was appropriate to address the results of this study.

Yours truly,



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CC:

- Okanagan MLAs: Harwinder Sandhu, Norm Letnick, Renee Merrifield, Ben Stewart, Dan Ashton, Roly Russell
- Okanagan Nation Alliance, Chiefs Executive Council
- Okanagan Local Government Chairs and Mayors
- Okanagan MPs: Mel Arnold, Tracy Gray, Dan Albas, Richard Cannings
- Pacific NorthWest Economic Region: Matt Morrison, Chief Executive Officer
- Invasive Species Council of B.C.: Gail Wallin, Executive Director
- Okanagan Chambers of Commerce
- Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association
- Union of BC Municipalities
- Shuswap Watershed Council
- Okanagan and Similkameen Invasive Species Society