

DON'T MISS

Osoyoos Museum board president updates council on plans to start apply

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By staff1 on February 20, 2018

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A delegation of municipal representatives from the Okanagan Basin Water Board was in Ottawa last June and met with federal government officials to urge them to take stronger action to prevent the spread of invasive mussels. But the OBWB now says it's received no follow-up and it's tired of waiting on the feds. From left are: Tracy Gray (chair), MP Terry Beech, MP Stephen Fuhr, Juliette Cunningham (vice chair), Peter Waterman (director) and Doug Findlater (past chair and director). Beech is parliamentary secretary to Dominic LeBlanc, the minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard. Fuhr is the MP for Kelowna-Lake Country. (Contributed photo)

Federal officials have provided some answers to questions about how they are dealing with the threat posed by invasive mussels, but many questions remain.

And they've clarified that only a small portion of federal funding announced last year to address aquatic invasive species is being spent to combat the spread of mussels.

The Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) recently wrote to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, Public Safety Minister Ralph Goodale, Fisheries Minister Dominic LeBlanc and Environment Minister Catherine McKenna expressing concerns about lack of federal follow-up on this issue.

The *Osoyoos Times* recently contacted the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) and the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) to ask about actions the federal government is taking to prevent the spread of invasive zebra and quagga mussels.

Of concern to the OBWB was the lack of information about how \$43.8 million announced in the 2017-18 federal budget to combat invasive aquatic species over five years is being allocated.

DFO says the bulk of about \$5 million allocated for 2017-18 is being spent for a renewed Asian Carp Program and increased contributions to the Sea Lamprey Control Program – both major threats to the Great Lakes.

By contrast, only \$1.12 million of the \$5 million is being allocated for the National AIS (Aquatic Invasive Species) Core Program, of which invasive mussels are just one component.

"The mandate of the National AIS Core Program is to develop a robust national program to implement the Aquatic Invasive Species Regulations, which came into force in 2015," DFO told the *Osoyoos Times* in an emailed response. "The regulations prohibit or control the importation, possession, transportation and release of 93 aquatic invasive species, including zebra and quagga mussels."

Some of the National AIS Core Program funds "are being leveraged with the three Prairie Provinces where zebra and quagga mussels are a high priority," the DFO response added.

Asked if any such federal funds addressing zebra and quagga mussels have been spent, DFO replied that its Central and Arctic Region has been working with the Prairie Provinces "to leverage ongoing outreach and education activities focused on the prevention of spread of these mussel species."

The OBWB estimates that the cost of a mussel infestation to the Okanagan alone would be at least \$42 million annually – an amount similar to the entire five-year federal allocation for all aquatic invasive species in all of Canada.

Unlike DFO, CBSA said it did not receive any funding in 2017-18 from the \$43.8 million for combatting or detecting aquatic invasive species.

CBSA is responsible for managing entry ports on the Canada-U.S. border where many recreational watercraft are brought to Canada from the U.S.

Zebra and quagga mussels are typically spread by recreational boaters, who fail to properly clean, drain and dry their vessels after using them in infested waterways.

Quagga mussels have now spread into some waterways in the U.S. Southwest, while zebra mussels have spread across Canada as far west as Manitoba.

Nonetheless, despite lack of additional funding, CBSA says border services officers at all ports of entry across Canada have the authority to detain and refer to DFO or provincial authorities any aquatic species suspected to be live Asian carps or live or dead zebra or quagga mussels.

"Border services officers are directed to contact the appropriate enforcement authorities for direction if any watercraft or equipment has been in the water in the past 30 days in any state or province known or suspected of having zebra or quagga mussels," CBSA said in an emailed response.

They also notify enforcement authorities if watercraft are not cleaned, drained and dried and free of bait, regardless of whether they've been in the water in the past 30 days, CBSA said.

"The CBSA works closely with the DFO and ... the B.C. Ministry of Environment to protect Canada from invasive species by sharing information, facilities and resources, as well as participating in training sessions," CBSA said. "Within the Pacific Region, the focus has been on the Lower Mainland and Okanagan and Kootenay land ports of entry based on risk and proximity to affected states and provinces."

CBSA said it is diligent in efforts to identify high-risk vessels for aquatic invasive species as part of its initial inspections.

"Prior to the 2018 boating season, all officers will be reminded of the requirements to pose questions to any traveller or importer entering Canada with watercraft or equipment," the agency added.

In her letter to federal officials, OBWB Chair Tracy Gray asked whether distribution of federal budget funds was being distributed by region or by invasive species type and who is overseeing it.

When the *Osoyoos Times* put the same question to DFO, they responded that the distribution of funding is occurring by region.

"Regions are responsible for developing regional action plans to address high-priority species in high-risk areas," DFO said.

Asked about OBWB concern that regulations should address the possibility that invasive mussels could be spread by aircraft such as float planes or water bombers, DFO said existing regulations address this possibility.

RICHARD MCGUIRE

Osoyoos Times

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