

Province, feds working to hold back mussel invasion



By \$curPaper.title

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Back in late April, council decided to put its support behind a move to prevent invasive mussels from entering B.C.'s lakes and streams.

Council directed staff to send a letter to the federal government, reaffirming its support for a 2013 Union of B.C. Municipalities resolution on invasive mussels after receiving correspondence from the Okanagan Basin Water Board.

At the July 14 meeting, council received positive replies from the federal and provincial government.

"It basically says they are taking the problem very seriously," Mayor Wayne Stetski said. "The federal government is developing a regulatory proposal to manage the threat."

Under the proposal, Canada Border Service Agencies will have the ability to enforce prohibitions at the Canadian border, which means turning back boats that have the invasive quagga or zebra mussels on them.

The increased enforcement ability comes as a result of recent changes to the Fisheries Act which solidifies and makes explicit the authority to address the aquatic invasive species (AIS).

"In recognition of the serious threats posed by AIS to Canadian freshwater ecosystems, (Fisheries and Oceans Canada)'s AIS program focuses on activities at the national and regional levels," Gail Shea, minister of Fisheries and Oceans, wrote to council. "These activities include scientific research, risk assessment and monitoring, socio-economic analysis, outreach and regulatory development."

Minister Shea referenced the role that the province plays.

In the letter from the province, Minister of Environment Mary Polak noted how serious a problem the mussels could be.

"A B.C. specific economic impact assessment of zebra and quagga mussel invasion determined these species would cost B.C. \$28 million per annum as a conservative estimate," Polak wrote. "Further, the establishment of these invasive mussels would also adversely impact the viability of important commercial, recreational and Aboriginal fisheries within the province."

Polak said the provincial zebra and quagga mussel Early Detection and Rapid Response Plan is currently in the draft stage and will be completed over the next several weeks. In the meantime, an interim prevention plan has been in place and implemented since the summer of 2013.

"While we have made significant accomplishments in putting policies, procedures and programs in place to protect B.C.'s waters from invasive mussels, there is still much work to be done," Polak said. "The province will continue to work with federal, provincial and local partners to build support and collaborative approaches to ensure the threat of invasive mussels is addressed."

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