

THE DAILY COURIER

Water board demands meeting, support in fight against mussels

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With growing support for action to keep invasive mussels at bay, the Okanagan Basin Water Board is pressuring senior levels of government to join the fight.

With word that Alberta now has inspection stations, the board is asking the provincial and federal governments “what’s taking so long?”

“We have been sounding the alarm for two years now, warning of the threat invasive zebra and quagga mussels pose to the Okanagan,” said board chairman Doug Findlater, mayor of West Kelowna.

“Our research indicates the cost could be more than \$43 million a year to just manage this problem. And while we have launched our Don’t Move a Mussel campaign to raise awareness, we need concrete action. . . The only organizations in a position to do this effectively are the provincial and federal governments.”

Board directors voted to up the pressure and are calling for a meeting with B.C. Environment Minister Mary Polak at September’s Union of B.C. Municipalities convention.

They are also writing to the federal Environment Ministry.

B.C. brought in legislation in December 2012 banning the movement of the mussels, dead or alive, but there’s still no enforcement, noted Findlater.

The water board has been urging the province to bring in inspection stations – similar to self-funded boater-pay sticker programs in the U.S. The board has also been calling on the federal government to pass pending legislation allowing Canada Border Services agents to stop and inspect boats coming into Canada.

Alberta has so far intercepted eight mussel-infected boats, all headed for the Calgary and Edmonton areas.

Alberta estimates the cost of an invasive-mussel infestation in that province would be \$75 million a year.

One female mussel is able to produce a million offspring each year.