

Lake Country Calendar PRINT THIS

Water Board calls for action, not words, from senior governments on invasive mussels



By Lake Country Calendar

Published: **June 04, 2015 01:00 PM**

Updated: **June 04, 2015 01:261 PM**

With the Province of B.C.'s declaration of June as "Invasive Species Action Month," to bring awareness to invasives including zebra and quagga mussels, the Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) has released its own declaration – a Position Statement on the mussels.

"Awareness is great, but action is better," said OBWB Chair Doug Findlater following a lengthy discussion of the issue at this week's board meeting. "The Water Board is doing all it can within its mandate to prevent the spread of these species into the Okanagan," he added, noting the launch of the Don't Move a Mussel campaign (www.DontMoveAMussel.ca), efforts to help local communities prepare, and an ongoing push on those with greater authority to do more. "Ultimately, it is up to senior levels of government to bring in the appropriate laws and enforce them," Findlater said.

In response, the OBWB has issued a seven-point Position Statement on invasive zebra and quagga mussels. Among the seven points, "the OBWB will not accept responsibility for the long-term treatment, mitigation or control of zebra or quagga mussels if the province fails to enact appropriate prevention measures, and consequently the species are introduced."

According to a staff report, there are lessons to be learned from the 45 years the Water Board has been conducting invasive milfoil control for the Okanagan. Over its lifetime, the program has cost Okanagan taxpayers over \$10 million, while the province has contributed less than \$8 million, and none in the last 15 years, the report states.

At the same time, research for the OBWB has suggested the cost of a mussel invasion in the Okanagan could be at least \$43 million each year in direct costs, lost revenue and property values, added maintenance of aquatic infrastructure, and irreparable ecological damage.

"In light of the cost of the milfoil program, the OBWB believes the province must accept the costly responsibilities for mitigation and control of this invasive species which we've been warning against since 2012, and not pass them to our local property taxpayers," said Findlater.

Speaking to the other points in the Position Statement, the chair added that the federal government is being called upon to complete the process of empowering its Canada Border Services agents to stop and inspect all incoming watercraft. This is something MPs Dan Albas and Ron Cannan announced at a special news conference in December in Kelowna, noting that they were hoping the regulations would be in place in time for the 2015 boating season. The boats are already coming, added Findlater. "We're hoping for good news soon, but the sooner the better."

The Position Statement also repeats the OBWB's ongoing call for the province to establish permanent inspection stations. On March 31st, the province also came to Kelowna and announced \$1.3 million to fight mussels in B.C. (\$149,000 in 2014-15, \$575,000 in 2015-16 and again in 2016-17). The funding in 2015 and 2016 in large part is for three roving inspection stations with six Conservation Officers total. For a little more funding, added the chair, the province could install five permanent and mandatory inspection stations along the B.C.-Alberta border – a call that is being repeated by an increasing number of local governments around B.C., residents and now even the B.C. Chamber of Commerce thanks to a push by the Kelowna Chamber.

Currently, as far as we know, B.C. is among only a few provinces and U.S. states that are still considered mussel-free, including Alberta, Saskatchewan, Washington, Idaho, Montana, Oregon and Wyoming. But Directors at this week's board meeting once again called for stronger action in response to news of two mussel-infested boats having been stopped in Alberta since the May long weekend. There was a close call at Sylvan Lake when a mussel-fouled boat from Ontario was stopped from launching on May 18 thanks to a mandatory inspection station in the area. Then, on Friday, May 22, another boat was stopped at an inspection station in Hinton, Alta., this time coming from Vancouver. According to a discussion with inspection staff, the B.C. boat was originally purchased from mussel-infested Arizona four years ago. It is believed that the boat has been on dry land every since, but their investigation is continuing.

It's obvious that Alberta is taking this seriously, added Findlater. Alberta has 10 permanent and four roving inspection stations currently in place (about 50 inspectors in all), plus they'll have three mussel sniffing dogs by July and another two by next season. Other provinces and states have also put in permanent inspection stations, recognizing the threat.

The law in B.C. states that it is illegal to transport zebra & quagga mussels in B.C. – dead or alive – and could cost a \$100,000 fine. The legislation is there, now we need the enforcement, he added. "We've made progress but it's frustrating. There is a strong case for permanent inspection stations, and it seems every other province and state gets that. Now we need the Province of B.C. to amp it up.

Find the board's full Position Statement at <http://tinyurl.com/pd9oofx>. For more on zebra and quagga mussels, the risk to the Okanagan and how to protect our waters, visit www.DontMoveAMussel.ca.

Find this article at:

<http://www.lakecountrycalendar.com/news/306182131.html>