

Water board won't pay if B.C. doesn't stop mussel invasion at borders

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With the Province of B.C. declaring June as Invasive Species Action Month, the Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) has released a Position Statement on zebra and quagga mussels.

"Awareness is great, but action is better," said OBWB chair Doug Findlater following a 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, 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.

The seven-point Position Statement on invasive zebra and quagga mussels includes, "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 more than \$10 million, while the province has contributed less than \$8 million, and none in the last 15 years.

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 as well as 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, Findlater said 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 31, the province also came to Kelowna to announce \$1.3 million to fight mussels in B.C. (2014 through 2017). The funding in 2015 and 2016 in large part is for three roving inspection stations with six conservation officers. For a little more funding, Findlater added, the province could install five permanent, 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.

Alberta currently has 10 permanent and four roving inspection stations, with three mussel sniffing dogs due by July and another two by next season.

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 enforcement is needed, Findlater added.

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.kelownacapnews.com/news/306190591.html>