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NEWS RELEASE

OKANAGAN BASIN WATER BOARD WELCOMES FORMULA 1 RACER IN “DON’T MOVE A MUSSEL” CAMPAIGN

Kelowna, B.C. – Today, the Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) and its WaterWise program welcomed Formula 1 Tunnel Boat Racing Team driver Mike McLellan, of Kelowna, in helping with its “Don’t Move A Mussel” initiative, working to protect Okanagan waters – and beyond – from invasive mussels. The announcement was made at a specially called news conference at the Water Street Boat Launch in Kelowna.

“This is great news,” said OBWB Chair Doug Findlater. “Mike is a high-profile driver on the Formula 1 boat racing circuit in Canada and the U.S., always drawing a crowd, and has a great understanding of the mussel issue and the need to protect our waters.”

Don’t Move A Mussel is aimed at raising awareness around highly invasive zebra and quagga mussels. 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. (See ‘Backgrounder’ below for more info.)

According to McLellan, he had seen the Don’t Move A Mussel billboards and other material in the Okanagan and went to the www.DontMoveAMussel.ca website. “After reading about the issue, I knew it was a concern for everyone who uses our lakes, paddle boarders, anyone who pulls an inner-tube off the back of their boat, anglers, beachgoers, just everyone.”

As such, McLellan contacted the OBWB and its WaterWise program, offering to help ‘Spread the message. Not the mussel.’ His boat, and the truck he uses to haul it, is now decaled with the Don’t Move a Mussel message, he’s handing out information cards and is talking up the issue with everyone he gets a chance to talk with.

“It’s something we all have to be aware of and be concerned about,” McLellan said. “This is a really big issue. There is so much at stake. Okanagan Lake is so beautiful, and as far as we know it’s mussel-free, but we have to stay on top of this. We, as part of the U.S. F1 Tour in 2015, have a unique ability to promote the message and that’s why we reached out to help spread the word.”

In addition to understanding the damage the mussels can cause, McLellan is a great ambassador for the “Clean-Drain-Dry” message, noted Findlater. “The burden falls heaviest on boaters to prevent the spread and Mike gets this. In fact, he partially disassembles his boat motor when he travels so it’s ready for inspection. He also has a video camera available with ready-access to the boat’s hull to allow inspectors to ensure his boat is clean of mussels.”

As for inspection stations in Canada and the U.S., McLellan says he has no issue with stopping and sees them as a necessity in helping keep the mussels out. “It’s easy, it doesn’t take long, and we’ve found the inspectors professional and very knowledgeable.

“Okanagan Lake is so important – to wineries, to industry, to tourism, our fishery, and safe drinking water. It is an asset that needs protection and if we can be a part of spreading the message, we’re in.”

According to research conducted for the OBWB, a mussel infestation would cost the Okanagan about \$43 million a year. They are a threat to our lakes ecology, our water quality, beaches, tourism and economy. Learn more about the mussels and the campaign at www.DontMoveAMussel.ca.

A backgrounder on the mussels is also provided below.

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BACKGROUND

A study conducted for the OBWB pegged a mussel infestation in the Okanagan at more than \$43 million a year to just manage. (http://www.obwb.ca/fileadmin/docs/2013_obwb_ais_report.pdf)

The mussels, which originate from Europe, spread quickly with a single female able to produce a million eggs per year.

The mussels were first introduced to Canada's Great Lakes region and the United States in the 1980s after ballast water was discharged by vessels traveling from Europe.

At their youngest stage, the mussels are microscopic (about the size of a grain of sand), and at their largest the size of a thumbnail (1.5 to 2 cm).

The mussels are known to stimulate toxic algae blooms, litter beaches with sharp shells, clog boat motors, foul water intakes and outfalls, put fish and the ecology of lakes at risk, and more.

There is no proven method to eradicate the mussels once they arrive that doesn't also cause significant environmental impacts.

For more information on zebra and quagga mussels, the risk to the Okanagan, and tips to Clean-Drain-Dry and protect our waters, visit www.DontMoveAMussel.ca.