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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PROVINCIAL ANNOUNCEMENT ON B.C. MUSSEL DEFENCE EFFORTS A “GOOD START”

Kelowna, B.C. – For three-and a-half years, the Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) has been sounding the alarm about the strong possibility of invasive zebra and quagga mussels coming into our valley, asking the Province of B.C. and the federal government to act to protect our waters. In the meantime, the Water Board launched its own “Don’t Move a Mussel” campaign to help raise awareness. Today, the province announced improved protections. This follows a similar pronouncement by the federal government in December. The OBWB is pleased to see this issue gaining attention.

“It’s a good start, and we thank the province for taking action,” said OBWB Chair Doug Findlater, following today’s announcement. “It’s a foundation to build upon. And if the province determines that the threat of these mussels needs greater attention, we hope to see enhanced protection.” The province’s announcement notes \$1.3 million in funding over the next two years, beginning in April for the 2015 boating season. The plan includes three two-person trained auxiliary conservation officer crews conducting roving inspections in B.C. with the ability to decontaminate mussel-fouled boats entering B.C. from Alberta. The officers will also respond to boats identified as a concern by the Canadian Border Services Agency (CBSA) and other U.S. partner agencies. There will also be 24 new highway signs featuring the “Clean, Drain, Dry” (CDD) message at significant entry points into B.C., expanded monitoring for zebra and quagga mussels and an increase in CDD education and outreach.

“The OBWB still wants to see inspection stations at all entry points on the Alberta border. In the past, we have said at U.S. entry points as well, but that may not be necessary if CBSA takes this seriously,” Findlater added, referring to new federal regulations expected this spring. Those regulations would allow Canada Border Services officers to stop and inspect watercraft coming into Canada.

“We’re going to be monitoring this program closely for its effectiveness – how many boats are stopped and how many are mussel-infested,” Findlater said. “As it is, it seems we are still relying on the perimeter defence and those jurisdictions with advanced programs, like Idaho, to protect us – and we’re getting away with it, but that’s a risk.”

In response to those who say that it’s only a matter of time before the mussels get here, Findlater says “every year they’re not here is money in the bank, particularly for local governments.”

A study conducted for the OBWB pegged a mussel infestation in the Okanagan at more than \$43 million a year to just manage. The mussels, which originate from Europe, spread quickly with a single female able

to produce a million eggs per year. At their youngest stage, the mussels are 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 how to protect our waters, visit www.DontMoveAMussel.ca.

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