

Provincial funding for invasive mussel control a good start

By Steve Arstad

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Provincial funding to stop invasive zebra and quagga mussels from getting into the province's lakes amounts to "a good start" says Okanagan Basin Water Board chair Doug Findlater.

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PENTICTON - The province is recognizing the need to invest in the control of invasive zebra and quagga mussels.

The Okanagan Basin Water Board was pleased to see the province step up with improved protections for zebra and quagga mussels in the Okanagan Valley in late March.

The province is providing \$1.3 million in funding over a two year period, beginning this month. Three units of two-person trained auxiliary conservation officer crews equipped to decontaminate mussel-fouled boats will tour around the province. The officers will also respond to problem boats discovered by Canadian Border Services agents.

An education campaign consisting of 24 new highway signs featuring the "Clean, Drain, Dry" message will be initiated at selected entry points into B.C.

"It's a good start, and we thank the province for taking action," Water Board chair Doug Findlater says. He says the board had hoped for inspection stations along the border between B.C. and Alberta.

"If the province determines the threat of these mussels needs greater attention, we hope to see enhanced protection."

Findlater says the federal government is expected pass a laws this spring making importation of the invasive mussels a crime, as well as giving authority to border agents to inspect watercraft entering the country.

The Water Board has been raising the issue of the possibility of an invasion of zebra and quagga mussels into the valley for 3 1/2 years.

A water board study estimated cost to manage a mussel infestation in Okanagan Lake at more than \$43 million per year.

The mussels originated in Europe and have rapidly proliferated throughout eastern North America.

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