

December 15, 2016

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**OKANAGAN RENEWS CALL FOR STRONGER MUSSEL DEFENCE
WITH KEY PACIFIC NW ALLY, MONTANA, NOW INFESTED**

Kelowna, B.C. – With news that the Pacific Northwest’s Perimeter Defence is breached with invasive mussels now discovered in Montana, and with that state’s recent declaration of a statewide Natural Resource Emergency, the Okanagan Basin Water Board is once again urging the federal and B.C. governments to step up their zebra and quagga mussel defences.

“We wish to again express our deep concern that not enough action is being taken to prevent invasive mussels from spreading within the Pacific Northwest,” states a letter from OBWB Chair Doug Findlater to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (who is also Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs) and several ministers.¹

“We’ve been calling on the federal government, and the province, for a stronger defence system since 2012. And it has improved,” explained OBWB Chair Doug Findlater, noting federal legislation allowing Canada Border Service Agency (CBSA) officers to stop and interview those coming into Canada with watercraft, and their ability to notify the province when an inspection is required. In 2016, he added, the province, with financial help from Fortis BC, BC Hydro, Columbia Power and Columbia Basin Trust, introduced eight inspection stations, operating 8-10 hours a day, seven days a week, April to October. “We are pleased to see this, but there are still gaps in our defence, with inconsistent enforcement at our borders, and inspection hours that are not long enough. This, and more, needs to be fixed now, before next year’s boating season,” he added.

Last month, the B.C. government reported on its summer mussel inspection program, noting 683 watercraft were identified as coming from a “high-risk” province or U.S. state. Of those, 17 were confirmed to be carrying adult invasive mussels, with 14 coming from Ontario and the other three from Manitoba, Michigan and Nevada.² Crews also issued 92 decontamination orders, as well as 46 tickets and 36 warnings to passing motorists with watercraft who failed to stop at the inspection stations as required by B.C. law.

Also, last week, the OBWB heard a report from the Okanagan and Similkameen Invasive Species Society (OASISS) which is funded to assist with outreach on the Water Board’s [Don’t Move A Mussel](#) program. OASISS noted their boater survey this summer found an increasing number of watercraft coming from Manitoba – a concern since the province discovered the mussels in their waters in 2013.

“Infested watercraft have been intercepted on their way to the Okanagan. This, coupled with the fact that we have calcium-rich waters, known to put us at higher-risk for infection, means more needs to be done,” added Findlater. In the case of the federal government, the Water Board is calling for increased training and funding for CBSA, increased funding for containment to provinces already mussel-infested (Quebec, Ontario and Manitoba), increased funding to mussel-free provinces for prevention, and a commitment to research and education for prevention, containment, control and eradication methods. It also calls for stronger federal participation in forums to address the mussel issue, such as the intergovernmental Pacific NorthWest Economic Region (PNWER)’s Invasive Species Working Group.

¹ In addition to Prime Minister Trudeau, the letter was sent to Min. of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Ralph Goodale, Min. of Fisheries and Oceans Dominic LeBlanc, Min. of Transport Marc Garneau, Min. of Environment and Climate Change Catherine McKenna, and Min. of Small Business and Tourism Bardish Chagger.

² B.C. inspection results in 2015 found 36% of high-risk boats (the largest portion) entering the province were headed to the Okanagan, and 51% to the Southern Interior.

An OBWB letter sent to the province in May, recommended expanded inspection hours to at least daylight hours, and more Conservation Officers, including full-status COs with authority to pursue people who fail to stop for an inspection. The board also called on the B.C. government to revise its legislation to require all watercraft entering B.C. to report to an inspection centre before launching in provincial waters, and commit to ongoing core funding to ensure stability of the mussel defence program. These recommendations still stand, added Findlater.

“Our board also remains committed to doing its part to help stop the spread of these mussels, including with our Don’t Move a Mussel program,” said Findlater, adding that protecting our waters requires all hands on deck, including residents. “We encourage people to ‘Have the Talk.’ If you have family, friends or neighbours who are snowbirds who will be coming back in the spring with any kind of watercraft – boat, paddleboard, even fishing gear – from a contaminated area, make sure to talk about the risks to the Okanagan and the need to Clean, Drain, Dry their equipment. Also, if you, or someone you know, is planning on buying a watercraft from an infested area, follow the same procedure.

“It would only take one piece of mussel-fouled equipment to ruin our fishery, our beaches, tourism, harm our drinking water, economy, and more. We all have a responsibility here.”

An extensive 2013 [study](#) conducted for the OBWB estimated that zebra or quagga mussels could cost at least \$43 million each year to the Okanagan alone, in lost revenue, added maintenance of aquatic infrastructure and irreparable ecological damage. PNWER estimates a cost of [\\$500 million](#) a year to the Pacific Northwest.

For more information on the mussels, risks to the Okanagan, and prevention tips, visit DontMoveAMussel.ca.

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Rt. Hon. Justin Trudeau, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Youth

Hon. Ralph Goodale, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard

Hon. Marc Garneau, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Transport

Hon. Catherine McKenna, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Environment and Climate Change

Hon. Bardish Chagger, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Small Business and Tourism
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

December 15, 2016

Re: Urgent need to prevent invasive mussels from spreading within the Pacific Northwest

Dear Prime Minister and Ministers,

We wish to again express our deep concern that not enough action is being taken to prevent invasive mussels from spreading within the Pacific Northwest. In fact, since our last letter of May 24th to Minister Goodale and the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA), the situation has become even more urgent. In mid-November, the State of Montana declared a statewide natural resource emergency following confirmation of invasive mussels in a reservoir. Since then, the mussels have been confirmed in three of their reservoirs and are suspected in two more. This represents the first incident of invasive mussels being found in a water body in the Pacific Northwest, and puts them now within a few hours' drive from the Columbia River system.

The economic and ecological impacts of an invasion in the Columbia system are staggering, with the Pacific NorthWest Economic Region (PNWER) estimating an annual cost of \$500 million to just manage. With your government's stated focus on rebuilding infrastructure in Canada, it should be recognized that no single investment in infrastructure will have as measurable an impact as preventing invasive mussels from infesting our waters. As we've seen in other North American jurisdictions where an infestation has occurred, these mussels would affect drinking water intakes, hydroelectric facilities, agricultural irrigation systems, sewer outfalls, bridges, docks, retaining walls, and many other freshwater related systems throughout western Canada. The introduction of invasive mussels would also have significant negative impacts on fisheries, where our local Okanagan Nation has worked hard and over many years to bring back the local fishery. Tourism and recreation are also key to our economy – these sectors would also be at risk.

We urge you to again consider our call to action for increased training and funding for CBSA, increased funding for containment to provinces that are already mussel-infested (Quebec, Ontario and Manitoba), increased funding to mussel-free provinces for prevention, and a commitment to research and education for prevention, containment, control and eradication methods. Further, we ask that you assign senior public servants in your ministries to participate in forums such as PNWER's Invasive Species Working Group to demonstrate that the federal government takes this issue seriously.

We will continue to provide public education and outreach within our Okanagan region, while working with partners like the Province of B.C., the Invasive Species Council of B.C., and PNWER. We also look forward to working with your ministries as partners on this important issue. We urge that you give this matter high priority.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Doug Findlater".

Doug Findlater, Chair
Okanagan Basin Water Board

CC:

- Okanagan MPs: Stephen Fuhr, Dan Albas, Mel Arnold, Richard Cannings;
- Federal Critics: Hon. Denis Lebel, Hon. Erin O'Toole, Kelly Block, Hon Ed Fast; Blake Richards;
- Okanagan MLAs: Hon. Christy Clark, Hon. Steve Thomson, Hon. Norm Letnick, Eric Foster, Dan Ashton, Linda Larson, Jackie Tegart, Greg Kylo;
- Regional District Chairs for North Okanagan, Central Okanagan, and Okanagan-Similkameen;
- Okanagan Municipalities;
- Chiefs Executive Council, Okanagan Nation Alliance;
- Matt Morrison, Chief Executive Officer, Pacific NorthWest Economic Region;
- Gail Wallin, Executive Director, Invasive Species Council of B.C.