

Feds urged to flex mussels

Wayne Moore - Jan 15, 2016 / 11:58 am



Photo: Nicholas Johansen - Castanet File Photo

West Kelowna mayor Doug Findlater, right, along with MLA Steve Thompson are shown how boats are decontaminated.

The feds need to step up to prevent invasive mussels from entering the Pacific Northwest.

That sentiment comes from the Okanagan Basin Water Board in an open letter to several federal ministers, including new Fisheries Minister Hunter Tootoo.

The letter, authored by board chairperson Doug Findlater, states the board is 'extremely concerned' about the need for action to prevent invasive zebra and quagga mussels from entering the Pacific Northwest, in particular, B.C. and the Okanagan.

"An infestation could irrevocably harm our environment, economy, and way of life," Findlater stated in the letter.

"The mussels would impact every water intake, outfall, boat and dock in our lakes, and all other in-lake infrastructure. Of special concern in B.C. is the threat to hydroelectric facilities, agricultural production, tourism and maintaining pacific salmon species."

The letter went on to say an infestation could cost \$5 billion a year.

"The Pacific Northwest Economic Region¹ has recently called for an additional \$20 million from all partners annually to adequately protect the region from these mussels, with the ultimate effect being the protection from many other types of invasive species as well.

"The Okanagan Basin Water Board recognizes the federal government's announcement in June 2015, regarding legislation to prevent the spread of invasive species. However, more decisive action is needed to help protect Western Canada from the spread of zebra and quagga mussels through the following federal actions:

- Provide training and appropriate resources to CBSA to ensure agents can inspect and stop mussel infested watercraft from entering Canada.
- Establish full-time seasonal inspection stations at major provincial crossings in Banff and Jasper National Parks to protect the Columbia and Fraser River systems and their Pacific salmon populations.
- Fully engage in the Pacific NorthWest Economic Region Invasive Species Working Group to help implement the recommendations in the framework for Advancing a Regional Defense Against Dreissenids in the Pacific Northwest.
- Work with and provide funding to the provinces of Ontario and Manitoba for containment of existing infestations at source waters.
- Work with and provide funding to the provinces of Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia to assist in the implementation of a coordinated inspection plan for all remaining uninfested areas.

"We applaud the Government of Canada's stated commitment to provide much needed infrastructure improvement for Canadian communities.

"While we support this investment, particularly in the area of water supply and quality improvement infrastructure, the cost of necessary future investments in retrofitting and maintenance can be greatly reduced by preventing the spread of invasive zebra and quagga mussels.

"We urge that you give this matter high priority in your ministries."

This past summer, six mobile decontamination units were used at strategic points throughout the province.

Twenty-six boats were found that required decontamination and four of them required a full 30-day quarantine period.