



Municipal politicians push mussel message

NDP listen to advocating for tougher invasive mussel policies

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B.C.'s new environment minister George Heyman was given an indoctrination by regional politicians on the concerns surrounding invasive zebra and quagga mussels.

During the course of the Union of B.C. Municipalities convention this week, Heyman met with four delegations wanting to update him about this issue.

He met with several Okanagan Basin Water Board directors on Thursday who also serve on municipal councils and was presented with recommendations on how to better prevent mussel infestations from reaching Okanagan and Shuswap waters.

The recommendations called for:

- legislative changes requiring all watercraft entering B.C. to report to a mussel inspection station prior to launching in any provincial waters
- expand watercraft inspection and decontamination options for all boaters and increased warning signage at boat launches
- expanded use of trained mussel detection dogs, list invasive mussel infestations as a specific hazard under B.C.'s Emergency Program Management Regulation and recognize the province's Early Detection Rapid Response plan as a multi-agency hazard plan under Emergency Management B.C.
- expand number of full-status Conservation Officers with authority to intercept those who fail to stop at mandatory boat inspection sites

“It was important to make sure they were aware of the issue, what the previous government had done, and what is still required,” said OBWB chair Tracy Gray, a Kelowna city councillor.

“The previous government said they were going to follow through on additional OBWB recommendations and we want to ensure these are still carried out.”

Joining Gray at the meeting were OBWB executive director Anna Warwick Sears along with board directors Juliette Cunningham, Doug Findlater and Sue McKortoff; Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen board chair Karla Kozekevich; and Southern Interior Local Government Association executive director Alison Slater.

The mussels originated from Eastern Europe and arrived on North America's east coast attached to ships, and have since hitchhiked their way across the U.S. and parts of Canada on watercraft.

They are known to stimulate toxic algae blooms, litter beaches with sharp shells, clog boat motors, foul water intakes and place lake fish and ecology at risk.

A 2013 study commissioned by the water board found the cost of mussels becoming established in Okanagan Lake would be \$43 million annually to manage the problem as there is no way currently to eradicate them.

The Pacific Northwest in Canada and the U.S. is one of the few remaining regions in North America still mussel-free.

Montana declared a natural resource emergency in October 2016 when they discovered mussel larvae in two of their reservoirs.

The environment minister also met with representatives from the North Okanagan and Columbia-Shuswap regional districts, municipality of Sicamous and the Splatstin Indian Band.

Moving forward, Warwick Sears said the new government is reviewing its current invasive mussel defence program, how to possibly improve it and the implications for such changes in the 2018-19 provincial budget.

"They asked us to send them an expanded list of ranked recommendations. They are looking for input from us. They explicitly asked for this," Warwick Sears said.

Given that 17 mussel-fouled boats were intercepted at B.C. inspection stations and one in five motorists hauling boats fail to stop at those stations, Warwick Sears said more work is needed.

“A lot has been done, but there’s a lot more we can do,” she said.