

**PINE LIGHTING**



**Province can do better to fight mussel invasion, water board says**

By Jenna Hickman





*The OBWB says quagga and zebra mussels should be seen as a natural emergency.  
Image Credit: Image Credit: Contributed/US National Parks Service*

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KELOWNA -The Okanagan Basin Water Board is calling on the province to do more help with the risk of mussel infestation.

"We're asking the province to enforce mandatory inspection of all watercrafts coming into our local waterways," says Corinne Jackson, the OBWB's communications director.

Watercrafts include everything coming into contact with local lakes, rivers and streams - from boats to kayaks to paddle boards. Additionally, this includes fishing gear.

After a meeting Feb. 7, the board voted to send a letter to the provincial government calling for stronger action on the prevention of mussel infestation.

The board is asking the province to extend the current hours of inspection, and to see invasive mussels acknowledged as a natural emergency.

Currently there are eight inspection stations set up along the B.C. and Alta. border, as well as the border between B.C. and Washington state. These inspection stations run about 10 hours per day. According to Jackson, that's not enough.

"We're asking the province to extend their hours of operation, currently there are a lot of hours where no one is stopping incoming watercrafts," Jackson said.

Jackson admits that extending inspection hours would be costly, so she suggests bringing in regulations where watercrafts have to be inspected before merging into local waters.

According to Jackson, the province is working to extend daylight hours in two locations and aims to run night time inspection trials.

The mussels in question are not the kind you'd find on a menu, rather they are tiny, closely-related mollusks, called zebra and quagga mussels.

Most recently and of particular concern, the mussels have been found in Montana. In Canada, they are currently in Manitoba, Ontario and Québec.

If the mussels were to infest local waters it would cause several problems for the area, says Jackson.

According to a 2013 study conducted for the OBWB, it would cost the Okanagan at least \$43 million annually to begin to repair the damage to the ecosystem and aquatic infrastructure.

"It's in all our best interests to protect our waters, it's not just about our financial future," says Jackson. "The shells would litter beaches making them unwalkable, they can cause toxic algae blooms which would contaminate our lake and drinking water."

Originating from Europe, the invasive species first came to North America in the 1980s from traveling vessels, according to the OBWB.

The freshwater mussels attach themselves to any hard surfaces and reproduce at a rapid rate, with a female producing up to one million eggs per year.

"Once they're in the lake there is no way to effectively get rid of them, other than to drain the lake - we cannot drain Okanagan Lake," says Jackson.

Jackson is asking the public to start the conversation when it comes to invasive mussels.

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"It can be a difficult conversation, but if your neighbor is bringing back a boat that could've been used in infested waters - ask them about it."

To find out more about the invasive mussel species, you can visit [www.dontmoveamussel.ca](http://www.dontmoveamussel.ca) .

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