



Okanagan Basin Water Board Flexes Muscle on Mussel Issue

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Duane Grandbois

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After returning hopeful from a June 2017 meeting in Ottawa regarding invasive mussel prevention, the Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) is tired of waiting for a response. This week, eight months after that meeting and with another boating season around the corner, the board sent a follow-up letter on the "urgent need for federal action."

"We are disheartened that the federal government hasn't made this a priority in our area. We have had no follow up communication, or commitment, on how they would contain the

mussels in regions already infested and prevent them from spreading to Western Canada," said OBWB Chair Tracy Gray.

In June, Gray was joined by a number of fellow Water Board directors for a meeting with Burnaby North-Seymour MP Terry Beech who is also Parliamentary Secretary to the Min. of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO), Nicholas Winfield – Director General Ecosystems Management for DFO, Ashraf Amlani – DFO Special Assistant for the Pacific – West Coast, and Kelowna-Lake Country MP Stephen Fuhr. At the time, it was noted that \$43.8 million was allocated to address aquatic invasive species in Canada over five years (2017-18 fiscal year to 2021-22 fiscal year). The OBWB contingent made the case for some of it to go to invasive mussel action.

A 2013 study for the Water Board estimated that the economic impact of invasive zebra or quagga mussels to could be at least \$42 million each year in lost revenue, added maintenance of aquatic infrastructure and irreparable ecological damage in the Okanagan. A similar study found it would cost the Pacific Northwest \$500 million annually. In the Great Lakes, where the mussels gained a foothold in the 1980s, the annual cost to control zebra mussels in water intakes alone is \$250 million.

"We know from that June meeting that there is federal funding for aquatic invasive species and expect that some will go to protecting our region from invasive mussels. We also want to see funding and resources to develop a comprehensive federal strategy to protect our waters. That's our goal," Gray added.

"This is a non-partisan issue," the chair noted. "All of our Okanagan Members of Parliament have expressed concern about protecting our watershed. We need to see serious action."

This week's follow-up letter was sent to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau – Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Youth, Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Ralph Goodale, Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard Dominic LeBlanc, and Minister of Environment and Climate Change Catherine McKenna.