

News

Federal government hinting at mussel help

By Kathy Michaels

Increased funding for the Okanagan's effort to stop zebra and quagga mussels from entering local lakes could be on its way.

North Okanagan-Shuswap MP Mel Arnold recently raised the issue in the House of Commons and was told that it was being followed closely due to the potentially devastating effects to Okanagan infrastructure, power systems and hydro systems.

"I acknowledge what you said about the cost and consequences of not doing everything we can," said Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard,

Dominic LeBlanc.

"The government of B.C., I noted, has and is making some investments. My hope is to work with them to complement their investments."

Arnold pointed out that very little of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada's \$7.2 million budget makes its way to B.C. lakes.

"Eighty per cent goes to the Great Lakes," he said, adding that the remaining 20 per cent is spread over the rest of Canada.

LeBlanc said, in response, that the allocation of funding has yet to be determined

for the year ahead.

"I think the concern in the Okanagan is really severe ... maybe that 80 per cent funding you referred to doesn't have to be the ongoing circumstance and certainly not this year," he said. "I share and recognize the concern... we'd be happy to try and do more and I think we can."

Zebra and quagga mussels are freshwater bivalves native to the Black Sea region of Eurasia. Both species were believed to have been introduced in the late 1980s by ballast water from transoceanic ships carrying larvae, juvenile or adult mussels.

Zebra and quagga mussels are capable of heavily colonizing hard and soft surfaces, including, docks, boats, break walls and beaches. These colonizations are also responsible for clogging intake structures in power stations and water treatment plants.

The Okanagan Basin water board has been asking the federal government to enhance border inspections and allocate funding to improve mussel education, containment and prevention. They've estimated that the cost of a mussel infestation to the Okanagan alone would be at least \$42 million annually.