

Kelowna posted November 21, 2018 by John Luke Kieper

## Okanagan Water Board calls for B.C. Legislation to protect waters from invasive mussels

The Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) is renewing a call for legislation that would require all out-of-province watercraft to be inspected for invasive quagga and zebra mussels before launching in B.C. waters.

The call was sent out this week by letter to B.C.'s Minister of Environment and Climate Change George Heyman.

"This legislative change was the first priority in our list of action items provided to your ministry on October 20, 2017, following our meetings at the 2017 Union of BC Municipalities conference," wrote OBWB executive director Anna Warwick Sears. "We feel that there is still sufficient time before the 2019 boating season for the province to pass this legislation, and ensure that inspections are available in centralized locations for those with watercraft who do not report to a roadside station."



Photo Credit: File Photo

As of now, if someone enters B.C. with any type of watercraft and encounters an open inspection station on route, law requires that they must stop for inspection. Sears explained that this rule is good but it leaves a gap for watercraft that enter outside of inspection station hours, outside of inspection season, or through routes that aren't monitored.

"The province will never be able to completely seal the border. It is also an achievable, enforceable and almost immediate improvement. This Change would allow for spot-checking out-of-province watercraft for proof of an inspection at local boat launches, enhancing enforcement of the law."



The letter sent acknowledges improvements the program saw this year. With \$1 million in annual funding, the province added a second sergeant to help address non-compliance, inspection stations increased from 10 to 12, and a second mussel-sniffing dog is being trained to join the force in 2019.

The final inspection numbers this year found that 25 watercraft were carrying adult invasive mussels. The mussel-fouled boats were from Ontario, Arizona, Manitoba, Michigan, Utah, and Nevada, and were headed to the Lower Mainland, Thompson-Nicola, Okanagan, Vancouver Island, and Kootenays.

A 2013 study for the Water Board estimated invasive mussels would cost the Okanagan \$43 million a year just to manage.

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