

ENVIRONMENT

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Protect our precious waters from invasive mussels: Okanagan Basin Water Board to province



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Anna Warwick Sears
Okanagan Basin Water Board Executive Director

Global NEWS

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The Okanagan Basin Water Board wants British Columbia to draft legislation that would require all out-of-province watercraft to be inspected year-round for invasive mussels before launching into provincial waters.

Specifically, the Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) wants lock-down rules against zebra and quagga mussels, which, according to various sources, are deemed to be destructive to native habitat. The OBWB said its call was sent this week to B.C.'s Minister of Environment and Climate Change George Heyman.

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Currently, the province does have rules for out-of-province watercraft, along with 12 watercraft inspection stations, including one at Osoyoos and another at the Pacific border crossing, south of Vancouver.

However, according to the OBWB, there's a loophole in that the inspection stations are open only from April to October, and only during certain hours. Outside of those hours, plus from November to March, OBWB says watercraft could enter B.C. waters without inspection during that gap. Or watercraft could travel through routes that are not being monitored.

"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," said OBWB executive director Anna Warwick Sears.

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Sears added, "The province will never be able to completely seal the border," and that new legislation would be achievable, enforceable and would be an almost immediate improvement. The change, she stated, would allow for spot-checking out-of-province watercraft.

"Now that we've seen the results from this year's inspection program, we want to highlight what we see as remaining gaps," Sears said.

According to OBWB, 25 watercraft were found to be carrying adult invasive mussels this year. The boats came from Ontario (16), Arizona (3), Manitoba (2), Michigan (2), Utah (1) and Nevada (1). The watercraft were destined for the Lower Mainland (9), Vancouver Island (5), Thompson-Nicola (4), Okanagan (3) and the Kootenays (1).

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The program received advanced notice for 20 of the 25 mussel-infested watercraft, either from another jurisdiction, such as Alberta, Montana, Idaho and Washington, or by Canada Border Services Agents.

A 2013 [study](#) for OBWB estimated invasive mussels would cost the Okanagan \$43 million a year to just manage. The Pacific Northwest Economic Region (PNWER), made up of provincial and state government representatives, and with a mission to increase economic well-being and quality of life for all citizens in the region, has estimated a mussel infestation at \$500 million a year to the Pacific Northwest.

"It's too important to not do everything that we can," added Sears. "It's going to cost us millions and cause not only hardship but heartbreak if Okanagan lakes are spoiled by invasive mussels."

VIDEO LINK: <https://globalnews.ca/news/4686020/protect-invasive-mussels-okanagan-basin-water-board-province/>

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