



BC

Don't forget about mussels

OBWB warns against invasive mussel species during COVID-19

John Lawless - May 14, 2020 / 11:15 am



The Okanagan Basin Water Board wants to make sure the fight against zebra and quagga mussels doesn't get lost amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

The board hopes the pandemic won't sideline actions to protect the region's waters from the invasive species as increased water recreation is expected in the next few months.

"With the long weekend just ahead of us and summer just around the corner, we need to ensure this issue is not lost given the high costs of a potential infestation in our waters," says Corinne Jackson, communications director for the OBWB. "The board has forwarded a letter to B.C. Minister of Environment and Climate Change Strategy George Heyman, outlining its concerns and repeating its call for tighter regulations."

The letter calls on the B.C. government to take strong action against the mussels, which includes:

- Prioritizing legislation to require all watercraft owners to remove the drain plug of their watercraft before transporting it
- Increasing inspection station funding back to what it was in 2017, which was \$4.45 million per year
- Renewing the public-private funding partnerships which help to fund the inspection system, which are set to expire in 2021
- Establishing a working group to explore options and partnerships to enable legislation which would require all watercraft entering B.C. to report for an inspection station prior to entering provincial waters

"In light of the current COVID-19 crisis, it is apparent – more than ever – the devastating economic impacts that an invasion of these mussels would have on the Okanagan and the province, especially while we try to recover from the impacts of this pandemic," writes Board Chair Sue McKortoff. "We recognize the incredibly difficult economic position that this pandemic has caused for the government and people of B.C., and that is why we continue to urge your government to take all necessary action to prevent the introduction of species which could significantly add to the economic fallout."

A [study](#) carried out by the OBWB in 2013 indicated an infestation could cost the Okanagan at least \$42 million just to manage. Similar calls to action in July 2019 prompted a response from Minister Heyman who said 'pull the plug' legislation was being considered, as well as legislation requiring incoming watercraft to report for inspection before launching.

"Although we may not see the Canada-U.S. border reopening soon due to COVID-19, as summer approaches we will likely see more inter-provincial travel with watercraft," says McKortoff. "For at least the last three years, the number one source of infested watercraft coming into B.C. has been Ontario."

16 of the 22 mussel-infested watercraft found coming into B.C. last year had been from Ontario.

The OBWB is once again launching its 'Don't Move a Mussel' campaign this year in advance of an expected increase in water recreation over the long weekend and summer season. For more information on invasive zebra and quagga mussels, you can visit the [Don't Move A Mussel website](#).