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Long weekend launches mussel fight in Okanagan

Water board urging province to implement tighter regulations to protect lakes

JENNIFER SMITH / May. 14, 2020 12:50 p.m. / [LOCAL NEWS](#) / [NEWS](#)



With provincial park boat launches opening in time for the long weekend, protection of local lakes is top of mind in the Okanagan.

The fight against invasive mussels is ongoing for the Okanagan Basin Water Board, which is urging the province to muscle up and tighten regulations.

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"There is a lot for government to respond to right now, but the threat of invasive mussels remains, and their impact would be even greater under the current circumstances," said Anna Warwick Sears, OBWB executive director.

Increased water recreation coming on board prompted the board to write a letter to B.C. Minister of Environment and Climate Change Strategy George Heyman. The letter calls for stronger provincial legislation to help prevent the introduction of invasive mussels and other aquatic invasive species into B.C.

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."

While significant progress has been made by instituting a watercraft inspection system within B.C. and by working with other provinces and Canada Border Services Agency to monitor for infested watercraft from other jurisdictions, there are still serious gaps.

Specifically, the government of B.C. is called to:

1. Prioritize legislation to require all watercraft owners to remove the drain plug of their watercraft prior to transporting it.
2. Increase inspection station funding back to at least 2017 levels of \$4.45 million per year.
3. Renew the public-private funding partnerships which help to fund the inspection system and are set to expire in 2021.
4. Establish 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.

"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," said McKortoff. "For at least the last three years, the number one source of infested watercraft coming into B.C. has been Ontario."

Last year 22-fouled watercraft were intercepted coming into B.C. and 16 of those were from Ontario.

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