



Invasive mussels clutter up a boat prop. (File photo)

## Okanagan-Shuswap MP advocates for aquatic invasive species funding

COVID-19 impact on federal budget remains a concern

[BARRY GERDING](#) [Dec. 18, 2020](#) 12:00 a.m. / [NEWS](#)



COVID-19 has created a pandemic and economic crisis facing Canada, but MP Mel Arnold is hopeful that won't overshadow funds needed for the invasive mussels prevention and monitoring programs required to protect the Okanagan and Shuswap watersheds.

Arnold, the Conservative MP for North Okanagan-Shuswap, says the billions spent dealing with the impact of COVID is needed to keep the economy going and look after people in need. "But, I hope funding for invasive mussels isn't going to be affected by that. If we don't make the investment in prevention now the impact will be significantly more down the road," he said.

Arnold said the discovery of an infestation of invasive clams in Shuswap Lake in September should be a reminder of the importance to not lower our guard about invasive mussels.

He said the positive aspect is how the Okanagan Basin Water Board, Shuswap Watershed Council and Columbia Shuswap Invasive Species Society along with regional municipalities and regional districts are "all pulling in the same direction on this."

"All the stakeholders are invested in this because of the damage these invasive mussels can do if they get established in an Okanagan Lake or Shuswap Lake," he said.

"I know from my own experience prior to being an MP the damage caused by invasive perch and bass in the Shuswap Lake system and the devastation they caused. For invasive mussels, it would be even worse."

Those risks, studies have shown, would include up to \$50 million to maintain an infested waterway, money that wouldn't be available for other programs and would have devastating consequences for the tourism industry.

The impact of invasive Asian carp and sea lamprey on the Great Lakes absorbs about 80 per cent of the budget allocated for aquatic invasive species programs across the country.

"Preventing the proliferation of aquatic invasive species is a fraction of the cost of trying to manage or eradicate them," Arnold said.

He made that point on Nov. 24 to Bernadette Jordan, federal minister of fisheries, during a committee of the whole meeting in the House of Commons. "It's rare when we get a chance to questions ministers in that forum directly, so I wanted to take advantage of the opportunity," Arnold said.

While the minister's responses were non-committal, Arnold says he doesn't lose faith additional funding will be committed, pointing to the support of local governments and water protection groups to keep pushing and advocating.

Along with 24-hour inspection services at B.C.'s U.S. and provincial borders, Arnold, joined by Conservative MP Dan Albas (Central Okanagan-Similkameen-Nicola), has also asked for a boat passport system to provide a record to inspectors to review what bodies of water a watercraft has been previously used in; and amend Transport Canada regulations governing aquatic aircraft such as floatplane and water bombers to ensure such aircraft don't introduce invasive species from an infested body of water.

A letter sent to Bill Blair, federal minister of public safety and emergency preparedness, by the two MPs, along with Tracy Gray, MP for Kelowna-Lake Country, in July on these and other issues has yet to receive a response.