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Mussel inspection sit set up at B.C.-Alberta border. (Contributed)

Okanagan Basin Water Board calls for stronger invasive mussel protection

Letter sets out six recommendations for environment minister George Heyman to consider

[BARRY GERDING](#) / [Mar. 4, 2021](#) 2:27 p.m. / [COMMUNITY](#) / [NEWS](#)



The Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) wants the province to adopt enhanced measures to protect valley waterways from an economically devastating zebra and quagga mussels infestation.

The water board has sent a letter to B.C. Minister of Environment and Climate Change George Heyman with a list of six specific new calls to action.

The concern arises from the Okanagan tagged as the number one destination for potential invasive mussel-infested watercraft in B.C., coupled with close proximity to the Shuswap watershed, another high-level area of mussel infestation concern.

“Being the number one destination for zebra or quagga-mussel infested watercraft is not what we want to be known for,” said Sue McKortoff, chair of the OBWB and the mayor of Osoyoos.

“We need stronger measures to protect Okanagan and B.C. waters, the source of community drinking water, home to a recovering fishery, iconic beaches and water sports.”

According to the province’s reporting, 16 watercraft entering B.C. this past inspection season were confirmed carrying adult invasive mussels. Twelve of these were from Ontario, and one was from Manitoba.

(The other three were being commercially transported from the U.S.). Of these 16, at least seven were headed to the Okanagan.



Motor boat checked for invasive mussels at inspection station. (Contributed)

Also of concern is information shared at this week’s OBWB board meeting from its partner, the Okanagan and Similkameen Invasive Species Society (OASISS), indicating only 67 per cent of out-of-province boaters the society surveyed in the Okanagan last summer reported stopping at an inspection station.

This survey included socially-distanced interactions with 361 watercraft at 11 boat launches.

The six recommendations outlined in the letter to Heyman included:

1. Restore core inspection program funding to at least 2017 levels of \$3.8 million and adjust for inflation going forward.
2. Introduce “pull-the-plug” legislation and supporting regulations for enforcement this summer.
3. Review and update the provincial Early Detection, Rapid Response plan (EDRR), to include specific long-term planning for waterbody or regional quarantines once an infestation is found in B.C.
4. Provide tool-kits and resources for local governments to conduct vulnerability assessments, and to implement mitigation measures like retrofitting in-water infrastructure.
5. Introduce legislation to require all out-of-province watercraft to be inspected prior to being launched in B.C. waters.
6. Provide additional funding to invasive species groups in high-risk regions for monitoring, outreach and education.

A study for the OBWB found an invasive mussel infestation would cost the Okanagan at least \$42 million annually to just manage.

In response, the water board and its Okanagan WaterWise outreach program launched the “Don’t Move A Mussel” campaign in 2013 and has funded additional outreach and mussel monitoring by OASISS.

In all, the OBWB has spent more than \$565,000, and thanks to media partners have delivered a campaign worth over \$847,000.