

# Worries about mussels

## OBWB wants new laws protecting Okanagan from invasive mussels

Amandalina Letterio - Mar 5, 2021 / 4:00 am



Photo: Contributed

The Okanagan Basin Water Board is calling on the provincial government to bring in new legislation to protect local waterways from invasive mussels.

On Thursday the local government agency sent a letter to B.C.'s Minister of Environment and Climate Change, George Heyman, with a list of six calls to action.

"Being the number one destination for zebra or quagga-mussel infested watercraft is not what we want to be known for," says Sue McKortoff, Chair of the OBWB and 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."

Sixteen watercraft entering B.C. this past inspection season were confirmed carrying adult invasive mussels. Thirteen of these were Canadian: 12 from Ontario, and one from Manitoba. Of the 16, at least seven were headed to the Okanagan.

In addition, only 67 per cent of out-of-province boaters they 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.

"After an extensive examination of where our vulnerabilities lie, we have developed a list of critical recommendations that can help build up our defences," adds McKortoff.

The six recommendations include:

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 toolkits 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.

"Working with many partners, the province has come a long way in protecting our waters from a mussel infestation," the letter reads. "Closing these additional gaps, by adopting the recommendations noted here, will help bolster those efforts and provide an increased return on investment as we save millions of dollars by remaining invasive mussel-free."

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