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A joint letter by the Shuswap Watershed Council calls for more action to be done by the federal government to protect B.C. waters from the threat of invasive mussel species. (Submitted photo)

Shuswap water advocates push Ottawa for more action against invasive mussels

Letter sent to Minister of Fisheries calls for more funding and resources on the matter

BRENDAN SHYKORA / Jan. 18, 2022 6:00 p.m. / [LOCAL NEWS](#) / [NEWS](#)



Water quality advocates in the Shuswap are pushing the federal government to take stronger action to prevent invasive mussel species from entering local waters.

A joint letter from the Shuswap Watershed Council (SWC), the Shuswap Waterfront Owners Association and the Columbia Shuswap Invasive Species Society (CSISS) to Joyce Murray, Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, describes how an infestation of Zebra and Quagga mussels would have costly impacts to water quality, beaches, fish populations and habitat, water utilities, hydro-electric facilities and property values.

The letter requests more funding and resources from the ministry on the matter.

CSISS executive director Robyn Hooper says the organizations have early-detection monitoring programs for mussels, and they are educating people about how to prevent the spread.

Zebra and Quagga mussels make their way into new water bodies primarily by latching onto watercraft. To avoid spreading these invasive species, boaters should clean, drain and dry their boats and other watercraft every time they move from one water body to another. Another important step is to stop at watercraft inspection stations.

The letter to the ministry highlights a 2013 Okanagan Basin Water Board study that estimated the annual cost of an infestation in the Okanagan at \$42 million in lost revenues.

In the letter, the groups say the federal government has not taken sufficient action or provided adequate funding to address the issue. They say a federal investment could go towards four objectives: expanding the watercraft inspection program to allow for additional inspection stations and longer hours of operation; new measures to ensure aircraft such as float planes aren't transporting mussels; more early detection monitoring programs; and further education and outreach initiatives.

"We recognize watersheds are under a lot of stress by various factors," said Erin Vieira, program manager for the SWC. "Our request to the Fisheries Minister is a matter of prevention. We don't currently have any Zebra and Quagga mussels in B.C.'s waters, but we are concerned that without stronger prevention measures in place we are too vulnerable to a new invasion."

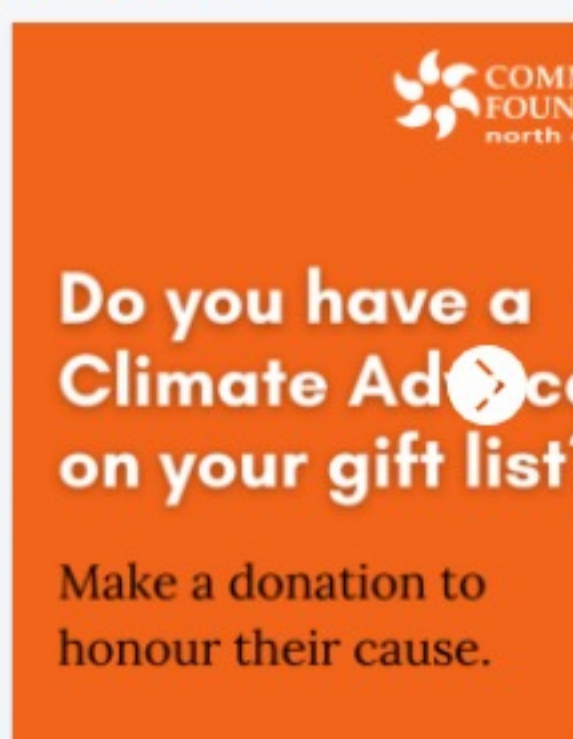
SWC chair Paul Demenok says the economic costs of a mussel infestation would be "enormous," and the environmental impacts devastating.

"This affects everyone, and we all need to do our part to prevent an invasion and we need much more financial support from Ottawa to improve our preventative efforts," he said.

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The SWC is now encouraging other organizations to send similar letters to their ministers to help bring more attention to the issue.

In 2021 the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy reported that 75 water bodies in B.C. were monitored throughout the season by various organizations including CSISS, collecting 900 plankton samples, all of which showed no evidence of invasive mussels.

Plankton samples from Mara Lake tested positive for invasive clam larvae, a different invasive species that's known to be already present in Shuswap Lake.