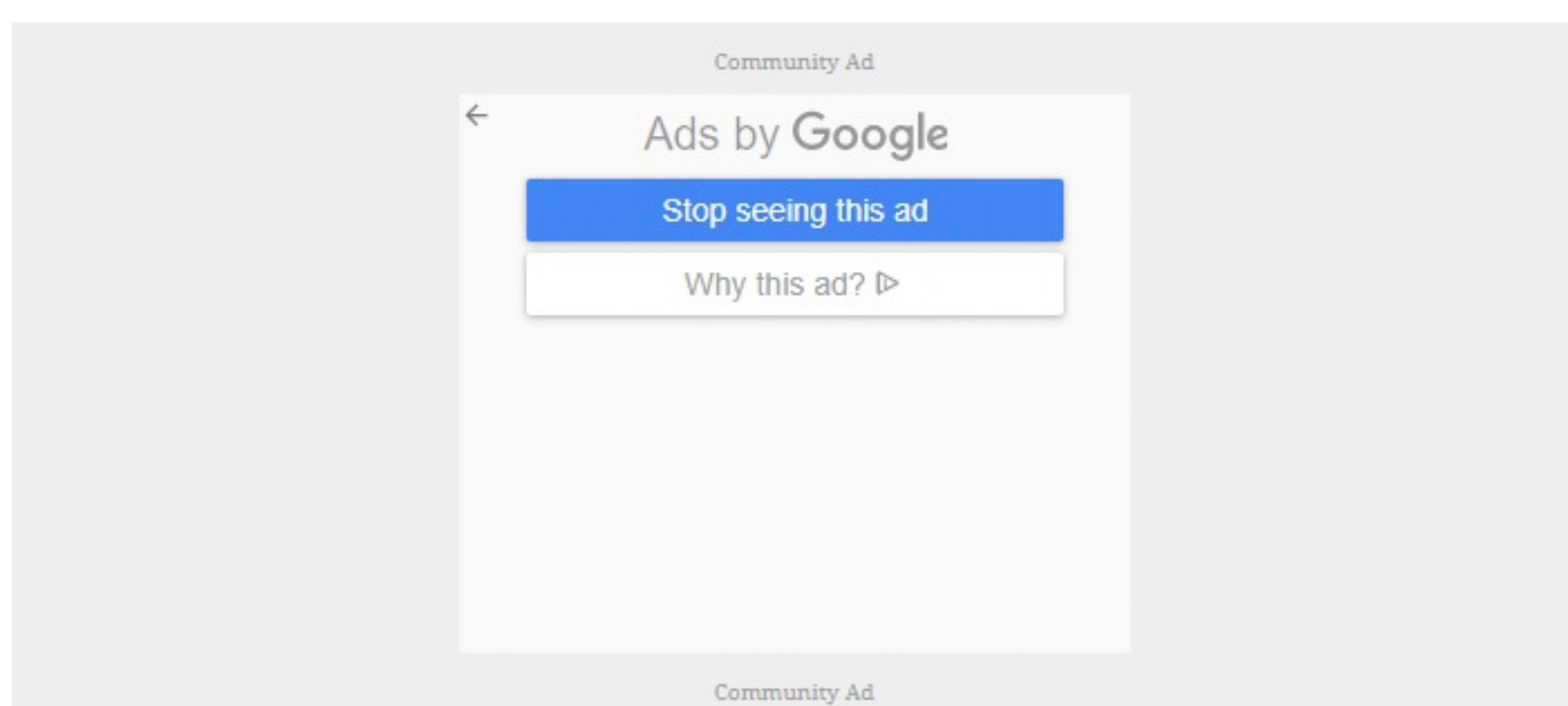


Provincial posted Mar 9, 2022 @ 04:30pm by Sarah Jones

Better invasive mussel protection needed in the Okanagan: OBWB

As boating season quickly approaches, the concern for incoming mussel-infested watercraft is a top priority for the Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB).



In an open letter to BC's Minister of Environment and Climate Change, the local government agency is calling on the province to bolster its Invasive Mussel Defence Program (IMDP).

With COVID-19 restrictions easing and more people making their way into the region this summer, preventing the spread of invasive zebra and quagga mussels is key to protecting Okanagan Lakes.

Since 2015, IMDP has prevented 137 infested watercraft from entering provincial waters by conducting more than 220,000 inspections.

A review of last summer's provincial mussel inspection numbers indicates that, for the second year in a row, the Okanagan is the top destination for these plagued watercraft.



Photo credit: Contributed | Kilo demonstrates his mussel-detection skills with handler Sgt. Josh Lockwood

"If we are BC's #1 destination for incoming mussel-infested watercraft, and we are encouraging tourism, we need to be better prepared," explains Sue McKortoff, Chair of OBWB and Mayor of Osoyoos.

A 2013 study from OBWB found that the cost of an infestation in our region would cost at least \$42 million annually to manage, making it crucial for early intervention.

With commitments like the annual **'Don't Move A Mussel'** campaign promoting the clean, drain, dry message to watercrafts; OBWB is recommending six additional measures to enhance the protection of BC waters.

1. Maintain IMDP core program funding at 2021 levels of a minimum \$3.5 million per year, adjusted for inflation going forward.
2. Introduce "pull-the-plug" legislation, requiring all watercraft to remove drain plugs prior to travelling on BC roads.
3. Review and update BC's 2014 Early Detection, Rapid Response (EDRR) Plan for invasive mussels, and provide a window for public consultation prior to final publishing.
4. Provide toolkits and resources for local governments to conduct vulnerability assessments and put in place 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 BC waters.
6. Provide additional funding to invasive species groups in high-risk regions for monitoring, outreach and education.



Photo credit: Contributed

Current funding for ongoing water monitoring administered through the Habitat Conservation Trust Fund is set to expire after the 2022 season.

A portion of this funding was provided by the federal government over a three-year term, and OBWB 'strongly supports' any provincial request for federal funding to continue this program.

"If invasive mussels arrived here, it's not just people who drive boats who will be affected. It will affect everyone," cautioned McKortoff.

Invasive mussels would become a recurring maintenance expense for in-lake infrastructure and would impact water quality and harm aquatic ecosystems.

When mussels were introduced to Lake Winnipeg, it took only two years for the molluscs to reproduce in such numbers that beaches became foul-smelling and un-walkable.

McKortoff added: "Can you imagine not taking your kids or grandkids to the beach in summer?"

Learn more about the risks that zebra and quagga mussels pose for the Okanagan [here](#).