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ENVIRONMENT

When COVID-19 travel restrictions drop, mussel concerns pick up on Okanagan Lake

By [Kathy Michaels](#) · Global News
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Call for more funding for invasive mussel program – Mar 10, 2022

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The Okanagan Water Basin Board wants the province to bolster protections for [Okanagan](#) Lake ahead of what's expected to be a busy tourist season.

"Since 2015, the (provincial Invasive Mussel Defence Program) has prevented 137 infested watercraft from entering provincial waters by conducting more than 220,000 inspections. Many of the infested watercraft were headed to high-risk Okanagan waters. Still, gaps remain in prevention," the Okanagan Basin Water Board wrote in a letter calling on B.C.'s minister of environment and climate change, George Heyman, for action.

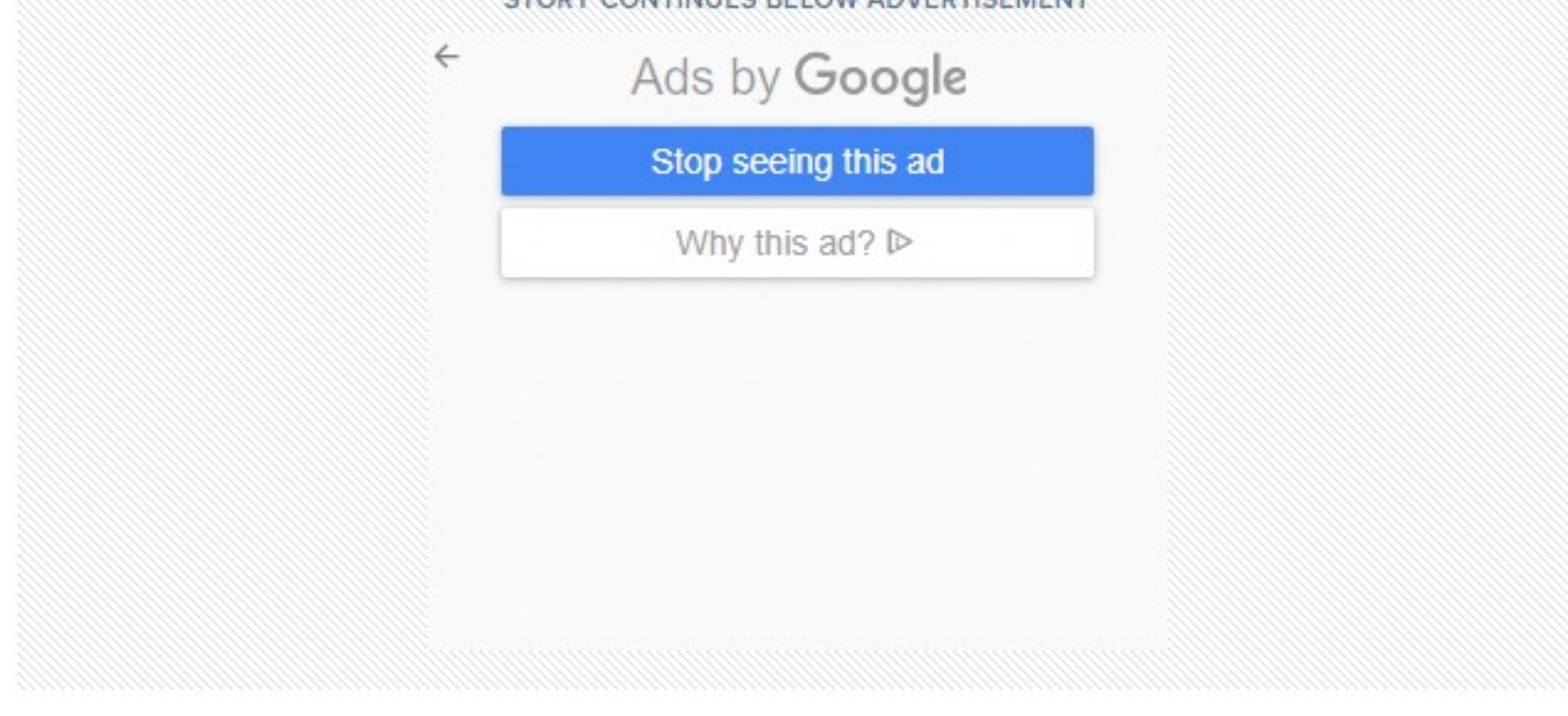
Last summer alone, inspectors caught 17 zebra and/or quagga mussel-fouled watercraft during times when the stations were open. Eight of those were headed to the Okanagan and concerns about what passes through when those stations are not open are top of mind for the water board.



B.C. government adds a second canine to help sniff out boats carrying an invasive species of mussels – May 31, 2019

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"If we are B.C.'s No.1 destination for incoming mussel-infested watercraft, and we are encouraging tourism, we need to be better prepared," Sue McKortoff, chair of the water board and mayor of the border town of Osoyoos, said in a press release.

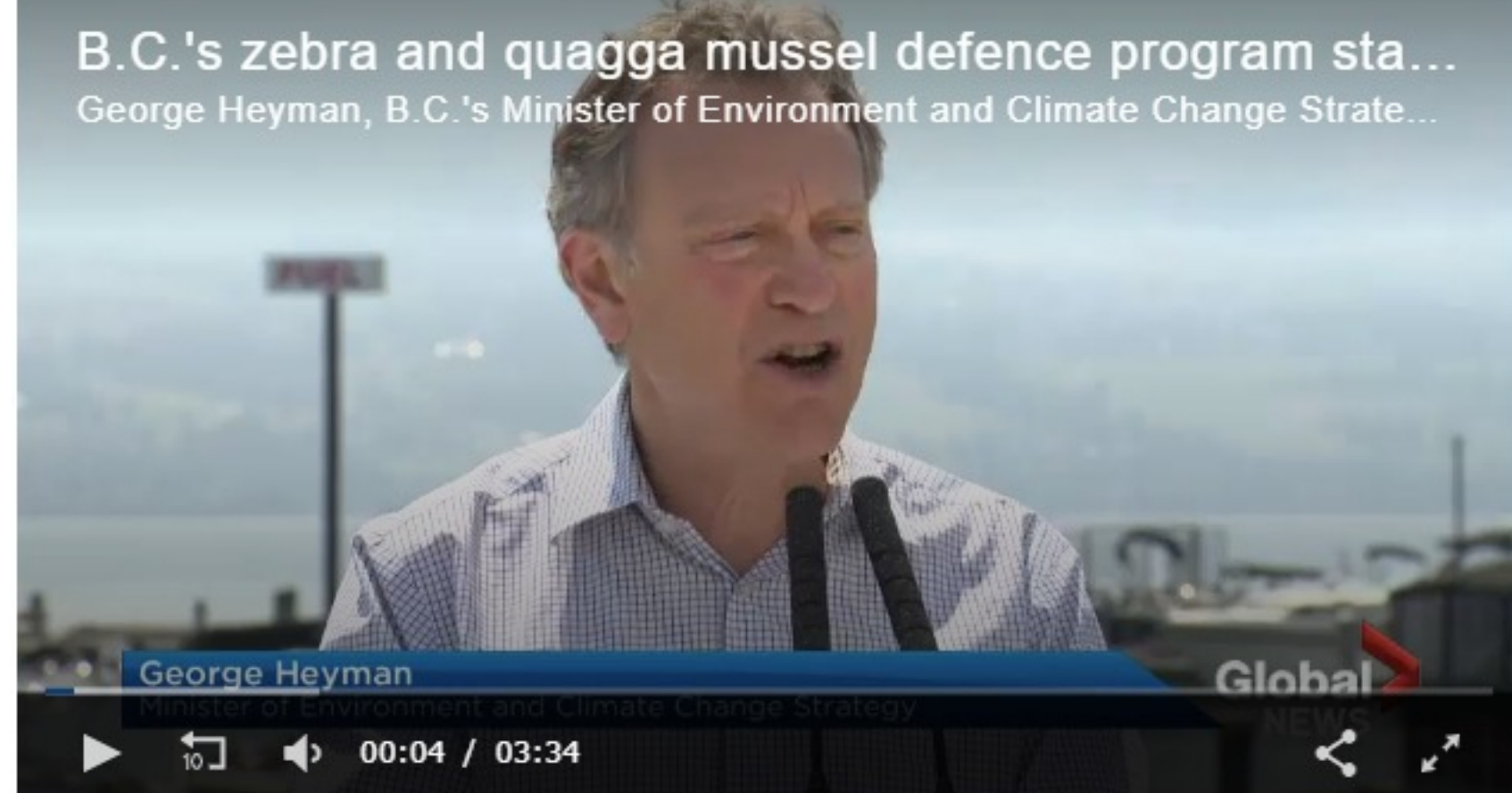


"If invasive mussels arrived here, it's not just people who drive boats who will be affected. It will affect everyone."

The mussels could become a recurring maintenance expense for in-lake infrastructures such as water lines, docks, and bridges.

McKortoff said the mussels affect water quality and harm aquatic ecosystems. Plus, when the mussels were introduced to Lake Winnipeg, it took only two years for them to reproduce in such numbers that beaches became foul-smelling and un-walkable, she added.

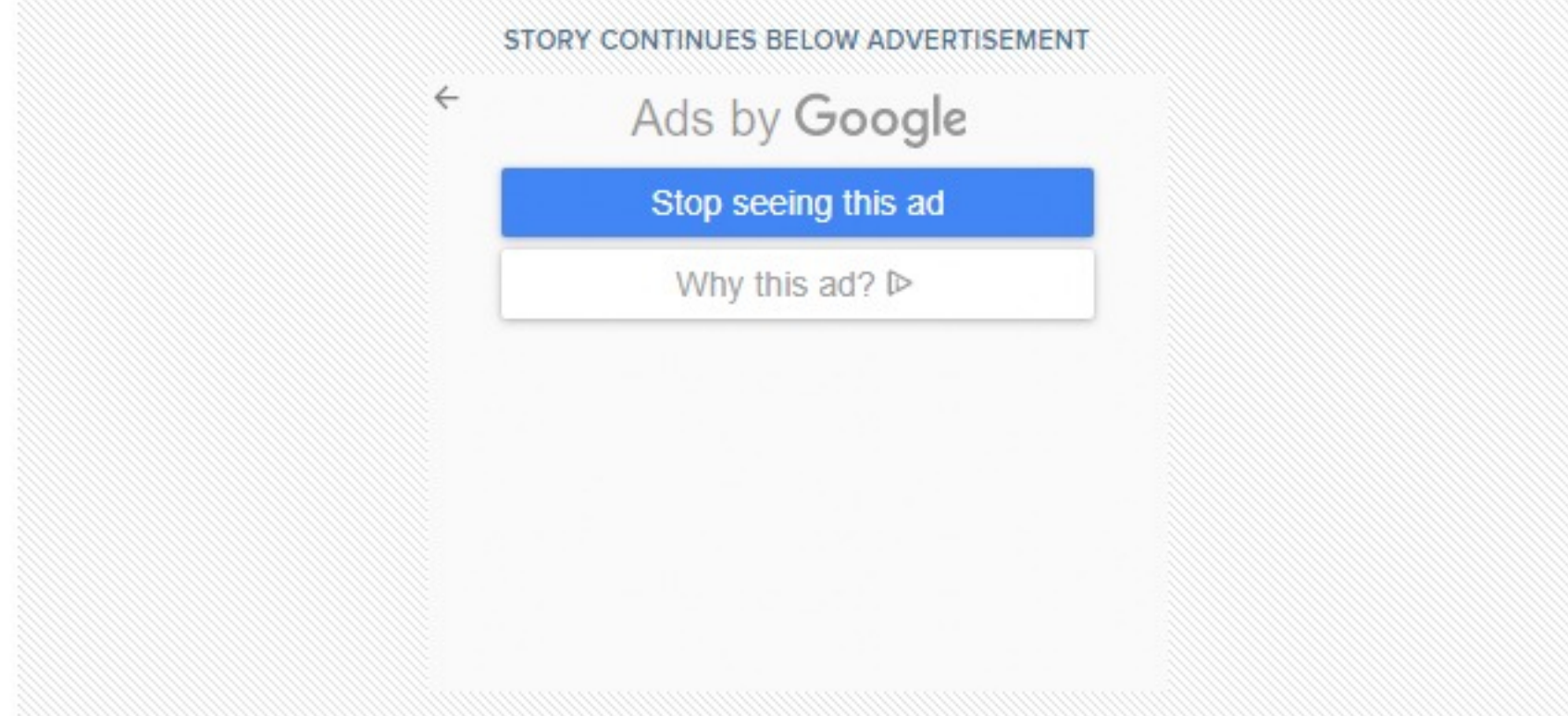
"Can you imagine not taking your kids or grandkids to the beach in summer?" she said.



B.C.'s zebra and quagga mussel defence program starts new season – May 31, 2019

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Watercraft purchases have increased in the last couple of years, on both sides of the border, as people were staying closer to home. Now with the border opening up, it's expected more people will be coming with their water toys, increasing the chances of invasive mussels being introduced to B.C. waters.



The OBWB's six recommendations are:

1. Maintain IMDP core program funding at 2021 levels of 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 B.C. roads.
3. Review and update B.C.'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 B.C. waters.
6. Provide additional funding to invasive species groups in high-risk regions for monitoring, outreach and education.

A 2013 OBWB study found the cost of an infestation to the region would be at least \$42 million annually.

The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Action was not available for an interview but did supply an email.

"Our government funds the Invasive Mussel Defence Program on an annual basis, to ensure that necessary resources are in place to protect our economy, our infrastructure, and our sensitive ecosystems." The ministry said in an email to Global News.

"We continue to integrate science, education, and enforcement as the foundation of B.C.'s approach, and work closely with neighbouring jurisdictions to prevent the spread of invasive mussels."

For more information on zebra and quagga mussels, the risks to the Okanagan, and how to prevent their spread, visit [DontMoveAMussel.ca](#).



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