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BOAT INSPECTIONS UNLIKELY

BC's environment minister says mandatory inspections of boats for invasive mussels 'not being pursued'

Jon Manchester - Mar 31, 2022 / 4:00 am



Photo: File photo

B.C.'s environment minister has responded to concerns over invasive mussels raised by the Okanagan Basin Water Board.

The water board sent a letter to the minister earlier this month, proposing a list of calls to action to stop zebra and quagga mussels from infesting B.C. waterways.

In his reply, George Heyman says the province is "working hard" to maintain funding at \$3.5 million for the Invasive Mussel Defence Program.

He says a requirement for inspection of all watercraft entering the province "is not being actively pursued by the province."

Heyman says such measures are "very challenging to enforce" and he wants to prioritize outreach and education, and optimize the perimeter defence approach.

However, he's willing to investigate the potential of "pull the plug" legislation for vessels.

He adds that \$100,000 has been committed from Fisheries and Oceans Canada for the 2022 season, and \$250,000 through the B.C. Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries.

Current federal funding for mussel monitoring by regional invasive species groups expires in March 2023.

"The B.C. Government is working hard to maintain the 2021 status quo IMDP funding at \$3.5 million for the coming season and working with partners on our shared commitment to this effort. Negotiations are underway to renew agreements with funding partners that expire this year," Heyman wrote.

"We are pleased to acknowledge that Fisheries and Oceans Canada has now joined as a funding partner with a \$100,000 commitment to the 2022 season. I would also like to acknowledge the B.C. Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries for its own commitment of \$250,000 for the coming season in recognition of the severity of a potential infestation to B.C.'s farming and fishery interests."

Several inspection stations along B.C.'s eastern border are expected to be operational in early April. Program operations for the peak boating season are still being confirmed.

Meanwhile, federal authorities are working with prairie provinces to develop a response management program following the discovery of mussels in Lake Manitoba last year.

That is the farthest west the mussels have been detected, and Manitoba has now established a program where watercraft leaving an infested lake must be decontaminated prior to launching in other waters.

A report to water board directors states: "As the province continues to be reluctant to implement mandatory inspections for out of province watercraft, it may be possible for Okanagan local governments to restrict local lake access sites to in-province watercraft, and to out-of-province watercraft that have proof of inspection through the provincial IMPD program."

Directors are expected to discuss the possibility at their next meeting.