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The Okanagan Basin Water Board makes six recommendations to fight invasive mussels. (File photo/Cap News)

Okanagan Basin Water Board pushes province for action on invasive mussels

‘If we are B.C.’s number one destination for mussel-infested watercraft, we need to be better prepared’

GARY BARNES / Mar. 31, 2022 10:00 a.m. / NEWS



The Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) has received a response to a letter it sent to the province regarding action on invasive mussels in Okanagan lakes and waterways.

The [March 9 letter](#), sent to Environment and Climate Change Minister George Heyman, outlined six recommendations. They include maintaining program funding levels at \$3.5 million per year, adjusted for inflation, requiring all watercraft to remove drain plugs prior to travelling on B.C. roads, and introducing legislation to require all out-of-province watercraft to be inspected prior to being launched in B.C. waters.

Minister Heyman’s letter stated the provincial government is working to maintain programming funding at \$3.5 million for the coming season, and that Fisheries and Oceans Canada has joined as a funding partner with a \$100,000 commitment to the 2022 season. Heyman said the B.C. Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries has committed \$250,000 for the coming season as well.

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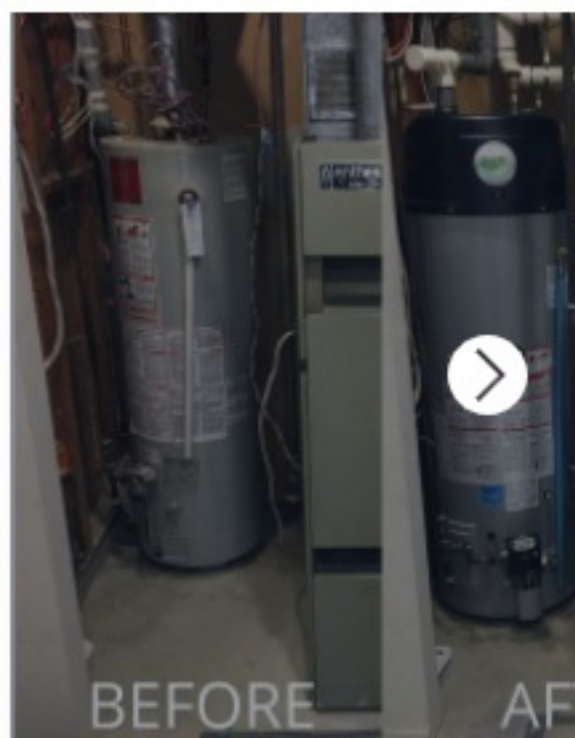
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The minister’s response pointed out that the idea of requiring all watercraft to be inspected prior to launching in B.C. waters is not being actively pursued by the province.

“We have learned from other jurisdictions with similar legislation in place that this approach is very challenging to enforce and as a result, their focus has been on education and awareness. B.C.’s approach through the Invasive Mussel Defence Program (IMDP) will continue to prioritize outreach and education, optimize our perimeter defence approach and investigate the potential of ‘pull the plug’ legislation. This approach is consistent with other western provinces and U.S. states.”

The OBWB letter states that since 2015, the IMDP has prevented 137 infested watercraft from entering provincial waters, with many infested watercraft headed to high-risk Okanagan waters. There are still motorists with watercraft failing to stop at mandatory open inspection stations.

Inspectors found 17 zebra and/or quagga mussel-fouled watercraft last summer during times when the stations were open, raising the question as to how many more come in outside of inspection hours.

“If we are B.C.’s number one destination for incoming mussel-infested watercraft, and we are encouraging tourism, we need to be better prepared,” said Sue McKortoff, OBWB chairperson.

An OBWB study done in 2013 found the cost of a mussel infestation in the region would be at least \$42 million annually to manage.