

# Okanagan water board fears funding cuts to Invasive Mussel Program

'This is critical, we are going right to the top'



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The federal government may be cutting funds that support invasive mussel inspections in B.C.

A letter to the media from the Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) says this is despite recently learning that the threat of these mussels is now closer than ever to the still mussel-free province.

The board has also sent a letter to several ministries including fisheries, oceans, environment and climate change, public safety, and the prime minister's office.

"This is critical, we are going right to the top," explained Sue McKortoff OBWB chair.

She said failing to protect freshwater ecosystems from zebra and quagga mussels would also ruin decades of work done by the Okanagan Nation Alliance and partners to bring salmon populations back.

The letter was also sent to B.C. MPs, MLAs, and the Assembly of First Nations.

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"The Government of Canada should provide funds to at least match provincial government efforts across the west, or plan for significant higher management costs in the near future," the letter states.

The OBWB pointed out that the federal government's announcement in May 2023 of a Canada Water Agency included a budget of \$750 million and funds to address water concerns in the Great Lakes, but contained nothing for aquatic invasive species protection in the west.

"Has the federal government given up on us?" asked Anna Warwick Sears, OBWB executive director. "Have they accepted defeat before we've even had an infestation here? That's what it feels like."

The OBWB has been stepping up its calls for action after last September's discovery of quagga mussels in Idaho's Snake River, a tributary to the Columbia River that connects to the Okanagan, and only an 11-hour drive to the B.C. and Alberta border.

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The closest infestation prior to that discovery was in Manitoba.

In October, the OBWB began calling for a temporary moratorium on watercraft coming into B.C. until results from Idaho's efforts to combat invasive mussels are known.

More information about invasive mussels is available [here](#).

**READ MORE:** [Results of invasive mussel report 'deeply troubling': Okanagan water board](#)