

CANADA

# Okanagan Basin Water Board wants more federal support to combat invasive mussels

By Doyle Potenteau • Global News  
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File photo of a demonstration showing what invasive quagga mussels look like. Ted S. Warren / The Associated Press

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An Okanagan organization dedicated to fighting invasive species is urging the federal government for more support.

This week, the Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) issued a statement, saying it's concerned to hear that federal funding for B.C.'s invasive mussel defence program may be reduced or cancelled this year.

"This, despite recent news that invasive quagga mussels were discovered in Idaho's transboundary Columbia Basin and are now closer than ever to spreading into Western Canada," said the OBWB.



In May 2023, the federal government established the Canada Water Agency, which has a goal of protecting the nation's waterways.

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The announcement said the government would invest more than \$750 million, with \$650 million going to major waterbodies like the Great Lakes, Lake Winnipeg and the Fraser River.

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Another \$22 million would be earmarked for provincial coordination.

That the Okanagan — which is currently free of invasive mussels — wasn't mentioned got the attention of the OBWB

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

Sears continued, saying "we appreciate there's a Canada Water Agency, but they're pouring money into remediation for the Great Lakes without protecting the still pristine waters in the west.



"The government has identified the Fraser River as a priority watershed. Regardless of what they do in the Okanagan, they should be true to their word and prioritize funds for the Fraser River. By protecting the Fraser, they will help protect the rest of the province."

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The board noted that before Idaho's discovery, the closest infestation was Manitoba. It also said **Idaho's response** was to spread more than 116,000 litres of toxic chelated copper into the river, killing almost seven tonnes of fish.

The OBWB noted that "wholesale killing of fish, invertebrates, amphibians, and plants in the river was considered better than letting these mussels take hold."

It also said support is growing for its temporary moratorium on watercraft coming into B.C., "with letters coming in from B.C. municipalities, chambers of commerce, the Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association, and others."