MUSSEL MONEY PLEDGED

More money pledged for the fight against invasive mussels

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Photo: Mark Hoffman
Zebra mussels on Wisconsin's Lake Winnebago Beach.

A provincial and BC Hydro announcement of $900,000 per year for five years to help keep invasive mussels out of B.C. lakes and rivers is being welcomed by the Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB)

"The OBWB has been concerned about invasive mussels since a 2012 report showed we were at high risk," said Bair Ireland, chairman of the OBWB board.

"At that time, we began advocating for stronger prevention and, in 2013, launched our Don't Move A Mussel campaign and began funding direct boater outreach in the Okanagan. Earlier this month, we launched an Invasive Mussel Vulnerability Assessment Guide. Each new partner and tool helps strengthen efforts to keep B.C. waters invasive mussel-free."

On Tuesday, the province, BC Hydro and conservation organizations announced they are increasing efforts to protect local waterways from invasive mussels out of BC with not only the funding from BC Hydro but also a collective contribution of $150,000 from the BC Wildlife Federation, Pacific Salmon Foundation and Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation.

The money will go to B.C.'s Invasive Mussel Defence Program (IMDP) which provides early-detection lake monitoring, watercraft inspection stations and public outreach.

Nathan Cullen, B.C.'s Minister of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship said the newly announced money will be added to the province's core funding for the program and the ongoing contributions provided by founding partners, including the Columbia Basin Trust, Columbia Power and FortisBC.

"I welcome the support from BC Hydro and our conservation partners as we continue the crucial work of keeping our waterways free of invasive mussels," said Cullen. "The province has made fighting invasive mussels a priority and we will keep taking action alongside our partners and communities."

Meanwhile, the B.C. government says it will continue to advocate for the federal government to resume funding the program.

The IMDP's operations include watercraft inspections, compliance and enforcement, lake monitoring, public outreach, signs and education. The program has strong and active collaborations with neighbouring jurisdictions across Western Canada and the United States, according to the province.

Inspection stations are open from April until October to prevent zebra and quagga mussels from hitching a ride on boats or other watercraft and entering B.C. waterways. Inspectors promote B.C.'s directive that everyone follow the "clean, drain, dry" guidance, preventative steps every boater is expected to practice when moving between lakes, rivers and other water bodies.

Invasive zebra and quagga mussels pose significant economic and environmental risks because of their ability to damage essential water infrastructure and outcompete B.C.'s native species and ecosystems. If introduced into B.C., the estimated cost of annual removal and management would range from $64 million to $129 million per year.

"Invasive mussels pose an increasing and significant risk not only to B.C.'s rivers and lakes, but also to our ability to produce electricity by plugging pipes and other critical equipment in our generating facilities," said Chris O'Riley, president and CEO of BC Hydro.

In 2023, inspection crews completed approximately 20,900 inspections and interacted with more than 39,200 people to promote Clean, Drain Dry practices, which are preventive steps all boaters should take when moving between lakes.

Last year, British Columbia Conservation Officer Service inspection officers extended their service into November and December following the detection of quagga mussels in Idaho.

That monitoring provided additional capacity to respond to notifications from the Canadian Border Services Agency at the priority border crossings with Idaho.

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