



Invasive mussel boat checks (Okanagan Basin Water Board photo)

MORE FUNDING

By Liam Verster

Provincial partners taking action to prevent invasive mussel outbreaks

Apr 30, 2024 | 5:00 PM

Efforts to protect local waterways from invasive mussels are being ramped up by the province's partners.

B.C. Hydro is supporting B.C.'s Invasive Mussel Defence Program (IMDP) with a new five-year commitment of \$900,000 in annual funding beginning in 2024.

"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," Chris O'Riley, president and CEO of B.C. Hydro, stated.

"We are proud to partner with the province's Invasive Mussel Defence Program and will provide \$900,000 per year for the next five years to mitigate the threat of invasive mussels. This funding is in addition to other initiatives and activities BC Hydro is implementing under its Aquatic Invasive Species Strategy."

The B.C. Wildlife Federation, Pacific Salmon Foundation and Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation are also contributing a combined \$150,000 for the IMDP.

"It is vital to the health of our freshwater ecosystems and fish that we keep invasive mussels out of B.C." Jesse Zeman, executive director of the B.C. Wildlife Federation, added.

"The impacts of invasive mussel infiltration could be devastating. We're very supportive of IMDP's work and we're pleased to team up with Pacific Salmon Foundation and Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation to fund some of the program's preventive activities this year."

The investments add to the province's ongoing work to prevent invasive mussels from entering B.C. and taking over local bodies of water.

"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," Nathan Cullen, Minister of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship, stated.

"The province has made fighting invasive mussels a priority and we will keep taking action alongside our partners and communities."

The investments were also well received from local water advocate organizations.

"The OBWB [Okanagan Basin Water Board] has been concerned about invasive mussels since a 2012 report showed we were at high risk. 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 help strengthen efforts to keep B.C. waters invasive mussel-free," Blair Ireland, Chair of the OBWB said.

"Protecting our waters from the threat of invasive species like quagga mussels is not just an environmental imperative, it's critical to safeguarding the economy and well-being of communities throughout the Columbia Basin. These mussels, if introduced, could cause irreversible damage," Johnny Strilaeff, president and CWEO of the Columbia Basin Trust, added.

IMPD operations include watercraft inspection, compliance and enforcement, lake monitoring, public outreach and education.

Inspection stations are open in B.C. from April through October for people transporting boats to use to ensure they are not bringing zebra and quagga mussels into the province.