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Kelowna council hears of devastating impact of invasive mussels

Estimated economic losses range from \$64 million to \$129 million annually



Gary Barnes
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1 / 3 Starting as small as a grain of sand, invasive mussels grow to the size of a thumbnail and spread rapidly, destroying lake ecosystems. (OBWB photo)



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It's a message that has been heard by several municipalities already, but it's one that the Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) wants to hammer home.

OBWB deputy administrator James Littley detailed the looming threat posed by invasive mussels to the region's economy and ecosystems at Kelowna council's May 6 meeting.

He told council that the estimated economic losses range from \$64 million to \$129 million annually.

That includes \$92.5 million to repair and replace water infrastructure, \$8.1 million for extra maintenance on boats and marinas, \$12.6 million in lost profits and revenue from tourism, and a \$30.2 million annualized decrease in property value and lost property taxes.

The figures do not account for ecosystem effects or loss of fish and habitat.

"We know now that we are at the highest risk of invasive mussels," Littley said

He noted that there are serious gaps in prevention work. Inspections are only required if passing an open inspection station, and there is no requirement to remove drain plugs from boats when out of water, where mussels can populate.

Provincial budget constraints and staffing shortages further hinder prevention efforts.

"It's just been brought up to \$3.3 million this year," Littley said.

Mussels have recently been detected in Idaho's Snake River, part of the Columbia Basin, an 11-hour drive from the Okanagan watershed.

Littley said the state's response was to use chemicals (chelated copper) that eradicated the mussels but also caused extensive damage to native species. He added such a response is not an option in the Okanagan.

READ MORE: [Facing threat of invasive mussels reaching Okanagan watershed](#)

OBWB wants a temporary moratorium on out-of-province boats until the full extent of the Columbia Basin infestation is assessed, or until comprehensive inspection protocols are implemented for all watercraft coming into B.C.

The board has asked the province to allocate \$4 million annually for ten years for prevention work, enhanced funding for inspections, and updated early detection and rapid response plans.

OBWB is also calling on the federal government to match provincial commitments.

"Right now the critical issue is federal funding," Littley said.

Mayor Tom Dyas promised continued support.

"As a council we will keep doing what we can to advocate," he added.

More information about invasive mussels can be found at dontmoveamussel.ca.