



WATER BASIN WANTS MORE HELP TO STOP INVASIVE MUSSELS



JERHETT SCHAFER
Friday, August 17th 2018 - 5:05 pm



The Okanagan Basin Water Board is requesting over \$2 million from the federal government to protect the region against invasive mussel species. The feds **recently announced** \$500 thousand in funding for research, and to help educate the public about invasive species, like Zebra and Quagga mussels.

The Board wants \$2,055,000, which would match provincial contributions.

“Right now there is not funding to stop all vessels at all times of the day. That’s one of the key asks that we have is, to actually expand on the operating hours of the inspection stations and also to give better capacity to the conservation officers,” explained Board Chair, Tracy Gray.

The Board says 25 mussel-infested watercraft were intercepted in BC last year. 14 from Ontario, 2 from Quebec and 9 from the US. Gray worries, without 24-hour protection, British Columbia is at risk, “Last week I got a phone call from someone who owns an RV park down in Osoyoos and someone pulled in that had some mussels on their boat but (inspectors) couldn’t get there until the next morning. Thankfully, they weren’t the types of mussels that are bad, like the zebra and quagga mussels, but they could have been.”

What happens if we do get invaded by the mussels? “You won’t be able to walk on the beach in bare feet,” warned Gray. “If you can picture these little tiny mussels that die and then they wash up on the beach. The odour and the volume of them is incredible. It also increases milfoil production, blue-green algae, it’ll hurt fisheries, a lot of municipalities use water from the lake, so there’ll be an ongoing maintenance program...”

A 2013 study, commissioned by the OBWB, estimated an annual cost of \$42 million in direct costs and lost revenues in the Okanagan region alone if invasive zebra or quagga mussels were to establish here. Estimates from the Pacific NorthWest Economic Region (PNWER) peg the costs of an invasive mussel infestation at \$500 million annually to the region.

In a letter written to Federal Fisheries Minister, Jonathan Wilkinson, the Okanagan Basin Water Board asks for:

1. Increased Lake Monitoring

Financial support for lake monitoring, administered by the Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation.

Request for annual federal funding: **\$150,000**

2. Enhanced Inspection Program Resources

Capital equipment needed on an ongoing basis for roadside inspections, decontaminations, signage and related equipment for Conservation Officers who are enforcing federal Aquatic Invasive Species legislation.

Request for annual federal funding: **\$50,000**

3. Increased Outreach, Education and Research

Provide funding for increased outreach, education, and research to stop the import, possession, transport or release of aquatic invasive species. Research component includes:

- Investment in exploring collaborative funding model options such as a boat sticker program, with the Province of B.C. which could leverage partner funds and work to secure long term funding sources.
- Increased federal and provincial staff capacity to enhance regulatory measures intended to mitigate the threat of invasive species, including zebra and quagga mussels.

Request for annual federal funding: **\$275,000**

4. Increased Coordination and Preparedness

Host an Early Detection Rapid Response exercise to prepare for a potential detection and Quality Assurance/Quality Control of the control options (such as a secret boater exercise), coordination between levels of government and multiple agencies.

Request for annual federal funding: **\$30,000**

5. Support Expanded Inspection Timings and Activities

Expand inspection station operating hours, staffing levels, and season length including:

- 12 stations and 2 roving crews; o 74 auxiliary inspectors (4 for roving crews)
 - o 1 station 24hrs (May – Sep);
 - o 9 stations dawn to dusk (May – Sep);
 - o 2 stations 10hrs/day
- o Station operations Mar 18 – Nov 10

Request for annual federal funding: **\$1.5 million**

6. Increased Capacity of Conservation Officer Service K9 Unit

Increase the capacity of the Conservation Officer Service K9 unit, which uses specially trained, multi-use dogs, enforcing both federal and provincial laws.

Request for annual federal funding: \$50,000

Total Request for annual federal funding: **\$2,055,000**

Visit dontmoveamussel.ca to find out more about invasive mussels

Keywords:

AM 1150