



Water Board Wants More From Feds Against Mussels

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The Okanagan Basin Water Board says it's good news the federal government is putting more money towards keeping invasive mussels out of BC waters.

But it's also sending the government a prioritized list for more action and a request for an in-person meeting.

Ottawa recently announced \$133,000 annually over three years for public outreach and education, and \$25,000 annually over four years for research.

In a letter sent yesterday to new Fisheries and Oceans Minister, Jonathan Wilkinson, the Water Board reiterated a call for more funding with a total request for annual federal funding is \$2,055,000, matching provincial funding.

Water Board Chair Tracy Gray says the Board is gravely concerned about the impact zebra and quagga mussels would have on the Okanagan and Western Canada.

"We need the federal government to take stronger action and help reinforce our defenses and contain these mussels where they are at, and work with Western provinces, states, and the U.S. government to protect our waters. We do not want to be in a situation, like we've heard from officials in Manitoba and elsewhere, where we are infested with zebra or quagga mussels and regret not doing more to prevent it."

According to a 2013 study conducted for the OBWB, the cost of an infestation to the Okanagan alone was conservatively estimated at \$42 million a year in direct costs and lost revenues.

The letter to Wilkinson reads, in part, "While we welcome the recent federal announcement of \$133,000 annually over three years for public outreach and education, and \$25,000 annually over four years for research, we ask that you consider the specific actions listed...for your annual budget, which will make a more sustained, substantial contribution to this effort."

Specifically, the letter calls for more funding for: increased lake monitoring, enhanced inspection program resources, increased outreach, education and research, increased coordination and preparedness, support of expanded B.C. inspection timings and activities; and, increased capacity of B.C.'s Conservation Officer Service K9 Unit.

These actions, the letter notes, "will have greater direct, long-term impacts to protect our B.C. waters."

"Last year, the U.S. federal government provided \$16 million (USD) to match funding in Pacific Northwest states for mussel prevention efforts. This year, the U.S. Department of Interior requested another \$12 million (USD), which is pending congressional approval," noted Tracy Gray.

"Looking at last year's B.C. inspection stats, we have more infested watercraft trying to enter B.C. from Eastern Canada than the U.S. We must increase our efforts on this side of the border."

In 2017, B.C. inspection stations intercepted 14 mussel-fouled watercraft from Ontario, two from Quebec, and nine from various U.S. locations.

"It seems appropriate that this be included in the annual federal budget since it is a national issue with huge implications for infrastructure, the environment - including fisheries, and more."

In 2012, the Okanagan Basin Water Board and its Okanagan WaterWise outreach and education program launched the Don't Move A Mussel campaign.

Since then, it has spent more than \$277,000 in local tax dollars on the initiative, and with support from the Okanagan business community, delivered a program worth over \$800,000.

It has also provided \$165,000 in local tax