



Kelowna

Call to action on mussels

Jon Manchester · Aug 20, 2018 / 11:32 am



Photo: Contributed
Mussel-infested beach on Lake Winnebago, in Wisconsin.

The Okanagan Basin Water Board is calling for more help to keep invasive mussels out of B.C. waters.

"We are gravely concerned about the impact zebra and quagga mussels would have on the Okanagan and Western Canada," says board chair Tracy Gray.

The board has written to Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard Jonathan Wilkinson, reiterating a call for federal funding made in April.

"We need the federal government to take stronger action and help reinforce our defences 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," Gray added.

An OBWB study found the cost of an infestation to the Okanagan would be \$42 million a year.

While the board welcomed 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, it wants support for increased lake monitoring and boat inspection totalling \$2,055,000 a year. That would match provincial funding.

The U.S. spent \$32 million last year in Pacific Northwest states on mussel prevention.

"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," Gray added.

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