

March 28, 2013

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **PUBLIC MEETING CALLED TO ADDRESS ZEBRA MUSSEL THREAT TO OKANAGAN WATERS**

**Kelowna, B.C.** – The Okanagan Basin Water Board, its Okanagan WaterWise program and the Town of Osoyoos have teamed up with invasive species experts to hold a public meeting to discuss the potential threat of invasive zebra and quagga mussels infesting valley waters and how to keep them out. The meeting is next Thursday, April 4, from 7 to 9 p.m. at the Sonora Community Centre in Osoyoos, B.C. at 8505 68 Avenue.

“This is the most important issue that has faced Osoyoos Lake and the waters of the Okanagan – on both sides of the border – since the arrival of Eurasian Watermilfoil,” noted Anna Warwick Sears, Executive Director for the OBWB. “In fact, an infestation of zebra and/or quagga mussels in our waters is an even more significant threat than milfoil, but there’s still time to do something.”

Zebra and quagga mussels, which originate from Europe, were first introduced to the Great Lakes of Ontario in the 1980s in a container ship’s ballast water. Since then they have been spreading quickly through Ontario and Quebec and through several U.S. states, sometimes unknowingly, but mostly by recreational boaters. Today the mussels are as far west as Lake Mead, Nevada and the Red River just south of Manitoba, fouling beaches with sharp shells, encrusting boats, ruining sport fisheries, and more.

Recent research conducted for the Water Board by aquatic biologist Heather Larratt conservatively estimates an infestation of Okanagan waters at \$43 million annually to just manage the impacts. Those items most at risk are fisheries, tourism, real estate values and water infrastructure (including public and private water intakes).

“The Okanagan is ideal habitat for these tiny – sometimes invisible to the naked eye – rapidly-breeding mussels. An Okanagan invasion would have devastating economic and environmental impacts,” said Warwick Sears.

Knowing the potential impact to B.C. communities, the Provincial Government recently brought in fines for moving the mussels, dead or alive. And, if the mussels do end up in Okanagan waters, it will be illegal to move boats to uncontaminated lakes without full decontamination. Educating people on how to spot the mussels and prevent them from entering our waters is key, Warwick Sears added.

Thursday’s meeting is open to the public and should be of interest to boaters, fishers, kayakers and other outdoor water enthusiasts, tourism operators, realtors, elected officials and community leaders of Osoyoos, Oliver, Oroville, RDOS, Osoyoos Indian Band, and Penticton Indian Band, and neighbouring communities. All are welcome.

Presenters include:

**Stu Wells**, Mayor of Osoyoos

**Anna Warwick Sears**, Okanagan Basin Water Board

**Heather Larratt**, Larratt Aquatic Consultants  
**Lisa Scott**, Okanagan and Similkameen Invasive Species Society  
**Jodi Romyn**, Invasive Species Council of BC

**For more information**

**Background report for the Okanagan by Heather Larratt:** [tinyurl.com/OKzebra](http://tinyurl.com/OKzebra)

**OASISS website:** <http://www.oasiss.ca/aquaticinvasives.html>

**ISCBC website:** <http://tinyurl.com/cqy73hl>

**Okanagan WaterWise website:** <http://tinyurl.com/cvloyo6>

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**MEDIA CONTACT:** Corinne Jackson, OBWB – Communications Director  
Office: 250-469-6271  
Mobile: 250-718-7249  
E-mail: [Corinne.Jackson@obwb.ca](mailto:Corinne.Jackson@obwb.ca)