

February 16, 2024

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

OKANAGAN WATER BOARD CRITICAL OF FEDERAL MUSSEL RESPONSE

Kelowna, B.C. – Syilx Territory – The Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) is providing clarification to this week’s federal mussel funding announcement, arguing it does not go far enough.

“Although this may sound like a win, and it is a welcome announcement, it does not address recent calls to action made to the federal government, from the Water Board, Thompson-Okanagan chambers, B.C. Wildlife Federation, Westbank First Nation, local governments, and others,” said OBWB Executive Director Anna Warwick Sears. “Most importantly, it does not directly support the prevention of invasive mussels in the west.”

In reviewing the Feb. 14 [news release](#) from Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO), they announced:

1. \$8.75 million over 5 years as part of the Aquatic Invasive Species Prevention Fund

The OBWB notes this is a re-announcement of funding from last year. And, this is a nation-wide fund which requires B.C. to compete for these grants with other aquatic invasive projects across Canada.

2. “Up to \$540,000” over three years (\$180,000 per year), starting in 2023 – last year – to the Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation (HCTF)

In other words, HCTF (which was provided funding previously to administer to B.C. invasive species groups to do mussel lake-monitoring) had to apply for and was successful in applying for one of these grants.

This will go to funding water sampling in lakes throughout the province to detect if mussels are already present. This is important and necessary work, but it is not a prevention tool.

3. DFO will purchase two new decontamination units to help the B.C. government’s Invasive Mussel Defence Program (IMDP) efforts

This will provide a few more resources to respond if a high-risk boat is stopped. Again, this is a welcome addition, but does not help detect or prevent invasive mussels.

“After reviewing the news release, it has been determined that our calls to action still stand since the announcement does not address federal funding gaps and solutions that would prevent invasive mussels,” added James Littlely, OBWB’s invasive mussel policy lead. For example, it does not include funding to expand or support B.C.’s inspection stations – a critical program that has been proven to stop infested watercraft from entering B.C., but which needs to be expanded.

“We believe the Government of Canada must become a funding partner of B.C.’s IMDP with direct funding and resources to B.C.,” noted Sears. “Otherwise, federal officials (Canada Border Service Agents or DFO Enforcement Officers) need orders and resources to take over the prevention program on the federal

border, leaving B.C's Conservation Officers to re-deploy along the Alberta-B.C. border. As such, all our calls to action remain."

Our latest federal calls to action can be found here: <http://tinyurl.com/2024-01-18-fed-calls-to-action>.)

To learn more about invasive zebra and quagga mussels, the risks to B.C. waterways, how to prevent their spread, and more, please visit www.DontMoveAMussel.ca.

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