



Reference: WLRS 32333 | ENV 405408

November 30, 2023

VIA EMAIL: sandra.ballan-brown@rdco.com

Loyal Wooldridge, Chairperson
Regional District of Central Okanagan
1450 K.L.O Road
Kelowna, British Columbia
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Dear Loyal Wooldridge:

Thank you for your letter of October 20, 2023, regarding the Okanagan Basin Water Board's (OBWB) Calls to Action on invasive mussel prevention in British Columbia (B.C.).

Keeping B.C. waters free of invasive mussels is an ongoing priority for our government. Both the Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship (WLRS) and the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy (the Conservation Officer Service (COS) in particular) remain committed to the Invasive Mussel Defence Program (IMDP) and its watercraft inspections, enforcement actions, lake monitoring, and education. We will continue to monitor changes in information, knowledge, and threats, as well as collaborate with neighbouring jurisdictions in Canada and the United States (U.S.) to ensure our prevention measures are commensurate to the risks posed by invasive mussels.

We are pleased to provide further information below on the Calls to Action put forward by the Okanagan Basin Water Board.

Call to Action: Introduce a temporary moratorium on out of province watercraft entering B.C. until the full status of the infestation in the Columbia basin is assessed, and until the effectiveness of the chemical and biocontrol treatments in Idaho is known.

Immediately following the announcement of the positive detection of quagga mussels in Idaho, the IMDP triggered operational changes to treat all boats coming from Idaho as high risk. This is consistent with the response plan for boats from any other mussel-positive jurisdiction. There have been no additional positive detections in other parts of the Columbia River Basin through B.C. or neighbouring jurisdictions' monitoring programs.

Call to Action: Introduce “pull-the-plug” legislation to be in effect prior to the 2024 boating season, and before the moratorium is lifted, requiring all watercraft owners to remove the drain plug prior to vessels being transported on public roads.

Regulatory tools to enforce Clean, Drain, Dry such as Pull the Plug legislation has been identified for consideration in the current *Wildlife Act* review. We encourage recommendations to be submitted through the *Wildlife Act* review process (WildlifeActReview@gov.bc.ca).

Call to Action: Ask Canada’s Minister for Public Safety to issue direction for all watercraft entering Canada at all border crossing from Saskatchewan to B.C. to be inspected prior to allowing entry.

IMDP program staff are working with Canadian Border Services Agency (CBSA) regarding the critical importance of coverage at the U.S. - Canada (the border) border crossings. IMDP staff are currently supporting the Federal Government’s border management by following up with each notification from CBSA and conducting necessary inspections and decontaminations when required. Any final decisions on either a moratorium on boats or adding resources at the border, is a federal jurisdiction.

Call to Action: Commit funding to the Invasive Mussel Defence Program of no less than \$4 million per year (all sources), indexed to inflation for at least 10 years.

IMDP funding relies on funding partners and fluctuates annually. In direct response, the Government of B.C. has either maintained or increased support in recent years, to maintain fundamental program operations. This year, financial support has come from BC Hydro, the Columbia Basin Trust, Columbia Power, and three B.C. ministries. Having your support in seeking funding increases is critical to our Ministries’ ability to work with funding partners to keep the IMDP a collective priority.

In May 2023, the report “*Potential Economic Impact of Zebra and Quagga Mussels in BC*” was released, and it identified a much higher potential economic impact than previous reports. However, several funding partners, including the federal government, have notified B.C. that they may reduce their financial support for the IMDP in 2024. We will continue to invest energy with our funding partners to strive for longer term resourcing solutions. We hear and appreciate your call for additional, secure resourcing. We also encourage you to share your expectations directly with the Federal Government, given there are accountabilities in both governments.

Call to Action: Enhance funding to recruit and retain B.C. Conservation Officers, Auxiliary Conservation Officers, and other IMDP staff as needed to 2019 levels (64 inspectors).

Recruitment and retention of Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) inspectors is an ongoing challenge for the IMDP, similar to other seasonal employment sectors. The team reviews and adjusts their recruitment efforts annually to remain competitive in the job market. This includes significant efforts to recruit at colleges, universities, and natural resource enforcement related programs. The IMDP has proven to be a recruitment pathway to careers with the COS and the natural resource management sector, and the IMDP has retained a number of AIS inspectors who provide valuable expertise and mentorship to new staff. However, we want to acknowledge that increased funding from the collective funding

partners, and a commitment for funding earlier in the year or for multiple years, would improve hiring success.

Call to Action: Update the provincial Early Detection, Rapid Response plan (EDRR), including a round of consultation with partner organizations prior to finalization.

A review and update of the EDRR is currently underway. The update will include reviewing available tools for invasive mussel response, containment, and control. Program staff (Martina Beck) travelled to Idaho to observe the quagga mussel response and treatment firsthand. This was a unique learning opportunity, and it will be used to inform the plan update. In addition, the IMDP is exploring the next steps for rapid response training and exercises with our United States counterparts in the Columbia River Basin. This was chosen as the initial action area, as these partners have been running rapid response exercises for many years, and the IMDP can learn from their experience.

Call to Action: Lead a planning process to create long-term response, containment, and control plans in regions at high risk of introduction and vulnerable to infestation, including the Okanagan, Shuswap, and Kootenay Regions.

The IMDP prioritizes locations for lake monitoring through the use of watercraft inspection and water chemistry data to identify priority waterbodies for further sampling. Lake monitoring efforts have primarily been focused in the highest risk regions of the Okanagan, Shuswap, and Kootenay. Going forward, we will update the Provincial Zebra Quagga Mussel EDRR plan. As noted above, this will include an intense table-top exercise which works through different scenarios with our American partners. This exercise will also focus on working with key response partners and provide an online webinar to inform the broader community interested in learning more.

Call to Action: Promote vulnerability assessments by utilities, local jurisdictions, and private entities.

We appreciate the work that the OBWB has been conducting on the development of a vulnerability assessment toolkit. IMDP leads have shared this with our Western Canadian counterparts. Additionally, the IMDP has recently conducted a technical review of the latest draft of the vulnerability assessment.

Again, thank you for raising your concerns, and highlighting the importance of the IMDP directly to us.

Sincerely,



Nathan Cullen
Minister
Ministry of Water, Land and
Resource Stewardship



George Heyman
Minister
Ministry of Environment and Climate
Change Strategy